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IN A PREACHER'S STUDY

✓ BY
GEORGE JACKSON, B.A.

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To
THE CHANCELLOR, PROFESSORS, AND STUDENTS
OF VICTORIA COLLEGE, TORONTO
IN MEMORY OF
FOUR YEARS OF HAPPY FELLOWSHIP
1909-1913

ABEUNT STUDIA IN MORES

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I

THE REFORMATION DOCTRINE OF THE
BIBLE

I

THE REFORMATION DOCTRINE OF THE BIBLE

CALVIN'S "special work," says M. Guizot, "was to replace the authority and infallibility of the Church by the authority and infallibility of the sacred monument of divine revelation; that is, to put the Bible in the place of the Pope."¹ *To put the Bible in the place of the Pope*: this, or something equivalent to it, has been for long the favourite formula in which the popular mind has summed up the aim of the Protestant Reformation of the sixteenth century. But the formula, familiar as it is, entirely fails to do justice to the facts. Later Protestantism, it is true, to its own incalculable hurt, has often sought in the Bible an authority of the same kind as Roman Catholicism finds in the Pope; but in the beginning it was not so: Luther and Calvin and the framers of the early Protestant Confessions had their minds set on quite other ends. To correct so serious a misreading of the past is not

¹ *St. Louis and Calvin*, p. 182.

only historically important, it might also prove, could one accomplish it, practically serviceable; for if modern Protestantism is to weather the storms which have burst upon it from all quarters of the intellectual heavens, it must be—so at least it seems to the present writer—by a return to the principles which the Reformers were the first to set forth in all the might of their simplicity.

I have entitled this paper *The Reformation "Doctrine" of the Bible*. It might, perhaps, be better to speak of the Reformers' attitude towards, or use of, the Bible. A "doctrine" of the Bible they had not, if by the term is meant exact and carefully balanced definitions applied with logical consistency and precision. Again and again, in reading their judgments on Scripture, one is perplexed by a certain inconsecutiveness, as of men who have not wholly grasped their own principles, or seen to what issues they necessarily lead. Why, we ask ourselves, if this is cast aside, is that retained? How come these affirmations and denials on the same lips? Why does the fountain send forth from the same opening sweet water and bitter? The truth is, of course, that deeply as the Reformers had meditated on Scripture, and well as they knew their own minds concerning its central significance, they neither answered nor asked the questions which for us to-day are so inevitable and imperious.

It was on other doctrinal fields that their great battles were fought and in which their chief interests lay. It is significant that the most authoritative symbol of the Lutheran faith—the Augsburg Confession (1530)—contains no doctrine of Scripture, that the Heidelberg Catechism (1563), with its one hundred and twenty-nine questions, is similarly silent, and that, even in Calvin's *Institutes*, out of eighty chapters but a few pages are devoted to this subject. Nevertheless, if the Reformers have left us little in the way of exact and rigid definition, their writings reveal an unmistakable attitude towards the Scriptures, and a way of using them, which were all their own. It is that use and attitude which it will be the aim of this paper to expound and illustrate.

I

And, first of all, let us endeavour to define with some exactness the true character of our indebtedness, as students of the Bible, to the Reformers. In the emphasis which is sometimes laid on what is secondary or incidental, or belongs rather to the revival of learning than to the revival of religion, that which is really essential is easily lost sight of. Thus, for example, it is said that it was the Reformers who rediscovered the Bible, in that, for the first time for centuries, they went back behind

the Vulgate to the Hebrew and Greek originals ; who cut down those monstrous jungle-growths of a fantastic system of interpretation which throughout the Middle Ages had darkened the sky and shut out the sunlight ; who first translated the Scriptures into the common speech of the people, and then scattered them broadcast, so that not only the bishop in his palace and the monk in his cell, but the peasant in the fields and the housewife at her spinning-wheel, might read for themselves the words of life. These things the Reformers did, and the greatness of their doing no Protestant at least will question. Nevertheless, we must go deeper than any of these things before we come upon their best work for the Bible and for us. Moreover, honesty compels the admission that, in the things just named, the service of the Reformers was not quite all that uncritical admirers have often claimed for it. For example, there can be no doubt that, loudly as Luther protested against the senseless methods of mediæval exegesis by which anything could be made to mean anything, the shackles of early habit and environment often proved too strong even for his sturdy good sense ; his exegetical principles were better than his exegetical practice.¹ It has also to be

¹ For some examples see G. H. Gilbert's *Interpretation of the Bible*, ch. viii.

said that the Church of the Middle Ages was neither as unvarying in its hostility to the Bible nor as ignorant of it as has been commonly supposed. Restrictions upon its translation and circulation of course there were, but, as Robertson Smith has pointed out, it was never wholly withdrawn from the laity, there were translations in the vernacular long before Luther, and his opponents made their appeal to it as confidently as did he.¹

It is not, I repeat, in their work as translators, exegetes, or humanists of any kind, great as this undoubtedly was, that the distinctive service of the Reformers to the Bible is to be found ; rather it is in their sense of the significance of Scripture as a whole, and the new use of it which they made and which they vindicated in the experience of believing men. To understand what is meant by this we must go back for a moment to that great experience of the saving grace of God out of which the whole Reformation movement sprang. "In Luther's personal experience of sin and grace," says Robertson Smith, "lay implicitly all that was new in the Reformation"²; and the Reformers'

¹ *The Old Testament in the Jewish Church*, p. 9. For evidence in support of the statements in the text see Lindsay's *History of the Reformation*, vol. i, p. 149, and H. B. Workman's *Dawn of the Reformation : The Age of Wycliffe*, p. 203.

² *Lectures and Essays*, p. 222. Let me take this opportunity of saying how much, and very much, these pages owe to the

doctrine of the Bible can no more be understood apart from their personal religious history, their consciousness of God's dealing with them in Christ, than can their doctrine of justifying faith. Luther knew that salvation came by a personal trust on God in Christ. This was his own great discovery. He knew it, not as he knew something that he had learned in a text-book, but as he knew that the sun shone in the heavens, by daily experience of its light and heat and power. And this great experience governed all his thinking, and not least his thinking about the Bible. To a man to whom faith meant no longer the mere assent of his intellect to a string of propositions about divine things, but the reliance of his whole soul on a personal Saviour, the old mediæval conception of Scripture was henceforth plainly inadequate and impossible. The theologians of the Middle Ages saw in the Bible only "a sort of spiritual law-book,"¹ a system of abstract truths which the Church interpreted and the faithful accepted. Truth about God the Bible gave them, but God Himself they did not look to find there. No living Presence made the cold, dead page to breathe and burn, no living Voice held converse with the writings of Robertson Smith. But for what I have learned from him they could hardly have been written at all.

¹ The phrase is Prof. T. M. Lindsay's (*History of the Reformation*, vol. i, p. 455).

souls of men.¹ But to Luther, with his new idea of faith, to whom religion was above all a personal thing, the Bible was not only something more than this, it was something different from this. His scorn knew no bounds—for, like other rough, strong natures, he was not careful to bridle either his lips or his pen—when he came to speak of grubbing theologians like Tetzels, to whom the Bible was merely a storehouse of texts, and who dealt with it, he said, “like a sow with a bag of oats.” “God Himself,” he cries, “speaks with us in the Holy Scriptures,”² speaks words of love and life to the soul. The Bible is the declaration of what is still in God’s heart with regard to us. It is a book of experimental religion, in which we find “God drawing near to man in Christ Jesus, and declaring to us, in Him, His will for our salvation.”

Nor is this view of the Bible peculiar to Luther. “This intense sense of the personal character of Holy Scripture,” says Bishop Westcott, “was more or less characteristic of the whole period.”³

¹ This is, I think, a just and true generalization; but it is only a generalization, and the exceptions must not be forgotten. Day in the spiritual world does not come as in the tropics, “at one stride.” There were children of the dawn, like Thomas à Kempis and the unknown author of the *Theologia Germanica*, before Luther; after him it was “daybreak everywhere,” but even then not yet high, sunny noon.

² *Table Talk* (Bohn’s edition), p. 20.

³ *The Bible in the Church*, p. 246.

It may suffice to quote Article V of the First Helvetic Confession : “ The whole Scriptures,” it declares, “ have no other end than to let mankind know the favour and good-will of God, and that He has openly manifested and proved this good-will to all mankind through Christ, His Son.” ¹

This new way of looking at the Bible carried with it a world of consequences. For one thing, it rescued the Old Testament out of the hands of the allegorists, who had pulled and pinched it into almost every conceivable shape. If, as the mediæval theologian assumed, the Bible is merely a storehouse of doctrinal truths and moral rules, what was to be done with those large sections of the Old Testament which, as they stand, clearly cannot be brought under either of these categories ? It was at this point that the theory of the fourfold sense of Scripture was brought in to help the theologian over the fence ; by its aid some kind of “ spiritual ” significance could be found in even the most unpromising material. Thus, to take but one example, in the famous Commentary of Gregory the Great, Bishop of Rome, “ Job is no mere historical personage, or the leading character in a sublime and inspired poem, least of all an Arab chief. He is a representative, now of the Christ who was to come, now

¹ Schaff's *Creeds of the Evangelical Protestant Churches*, p. 212.

of the true Church which He was to found. The man who is introduced as dwelling in the Land of Uz is no Eastern patriarch. The opening words which seem to describe him as such are written with another object than to specify the name and country of any inhabitant of earth. They convey, to those who can read them aright, the higher truth of Christ dwelling in the hearts of the wise. His three friends may to the eye of sense be Eastern chiefs, Arab sheikhs. To the pious reader they are the heretics who, in the first ages of Christendom, beset and imperilled Catholic truth. Job's seven sons are, now the sevenfold gifts of the Spirit, now, by a strange rearrangement of numbers, they are the twelve apostles, preaching the adorable Trinity in the four quarters of the globe. The sheep, the camels, the oxen, the asses represent different classes : the true disciples, the Gentiles, the Jews, the Samaritans. All is allegory ; every word and every act is symbolical." ¹ All this elaborate trifling Protestantism brushed aside

¹ Dean Bradley's *Lectures on the Book of Job*, p. 179. Here is one other choice example of ancient exegesis : Cassiodorus, commenting on Ps. viii. 6, 7 ("Thou madest him to have dominion," etc.), and interpreting the whole of the dominion of Christ, finds in the "sheep" of verse 7, those whose business in Christ's Church is not to teach, but to learn, and in the "oxen" those who labour in the word and doctrine, while the "fowls of the air" are the saints who rise above the world, and the fishes are ordinary Christians born of water and the Holy Ghost ! (See W. T. Davison's *Praises of Israel*, p. 203,)

with a strong hand. And it did so because, as I have said, it had no need of it ; it did so because to it the Bible was essentially the record of God's gradual self-revelation in history, and therefore even the smallest details of the history had their importance, not indeed as mystic symbols of some hidden spiritual truth, but as helping to complete the record and fill out the picture of God's communion with His chosen.

Not only so, but it is only as we remember that to the Reformers the Bible was a means of direct, personal fellowship with God, that we can correctly understand in what sense they spoke of it as the Word of God, and as the infallible rule of faith and life. Later Protestantism, unhappily, has often identified the Bible with the Word of God, and has treated all its parts, and even all its verses, as of divine authority. But this was not the position of the early Protestants. They distinguished clearly between the Word of God and the Word of God written, *i.e.* between the Word of God and Scripture.¹ In harmony with this distinction they spoke—as, for example, in the Shorter Catechism—of “the Word of God which *is contained in* the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments”; and though they might sometimes say, as do we, “the Bible is the Word

¹ *Westminster Confession*, ch. i, sec. 2.

of God," the copula was no more meant to express logical identity than in the familiar formula of the Lord's Supper, "This is My body." When, with our hand on the Bible, we declare, "This is God's Word, for in it God speaks, and speaks to me," all the Reformers are with us ; but when we go on to claim a divine authority for all that the Bible contains we are disowned alike by the facts and by them. Similarly, the infallibility which they predicated of the Bible was not an infallibility of the letter of Scripture, but rather, as the Westminster Confession puts it, of "the Holy Spirit speaking in the Scripture." In other words, the authority of the Bible is the authority of the divine truth which it contains and conveys.

And if any one had said to Luther, "But how do you know that this truth of which you speak is divine and therefore authoritative?" he and his fellow Reformers would have had their answer ready at once. They would have said, "We know by the witness of His Spirit in our hearts, whereby we are assured that none other than God Himself is able to speak such words to our souls."

Whoso hath felt the Spirit of the Highest
Cannot confound nor doubt Him nor deny.

On no point do the Reformers speak with greater unanimity and emphasis than on this, and it will

be well that we should listen to some of their own repeated declarations. "Nothing," says Calvin, "can be more absurd than the fiction that the power of judging Scripture is in the Church, and that on her nod its certainty depends. When the Church receives it, and gives it the stamp of her authority, she does not make that authentic which was otherwise doubtful or controverted; but, acknowledging it as the truth of God, she, as in duty bound, shows her reverence by an unhesitating assent. As to the question, How shall we be persuaded that it came from God without recurring to a decree of the Church? it is just the same as if it were asked, How shall we learn to distinguish light from darkness, white from black, sweet from bitter? Scripture bears upon the face of it as clear evidence of its truth as white and black do of their colour, sweet and bitter of their taste."¹

Charles Herle, the Prolocutor of the Westminster Assembly, states the Protestant position over against the Roman in this fashion: "They (the Papists) being asked, why they believe the *Scripture* to be the *Word of God*? answer, because the *Church* says 'tis so; and being asked againe, why they beleieve the Church? they answer, because the *Scripture* saies it *shall be guided into truth*; and being asked againe, why they beleieve that very

¹ *Institutes*, bk. i, ch. vii.

Scripture that says so ? they answer, because the *Church* says 'tis *Scripture* ; and so (with those in the Psalm xii. 8), they walk in a *circle* or on *every side*. They charge the like on us (but wrongfully) that we believe the *Word*, because it sayes itself that it is so ; but we do not resolve our *Faith* ; we *believe unto salvation* not the *Word* barely, because it witnesses to itself, but because the *Spirit* speaking in it to our *consciences* witnesses to them that it is the *Word* indeed ; we resolve not our *Faith* barely either into the *Word* or *Spirit* as its single alternate *principle*, but into the testimony of the *Spirit* speaking to our *consciences* in the *Word*.”¹ “ We know these books to be canonical and the sure rule of our faith,” says the Gallican Confession (1559), after naming the books contained in our Old and New Testaments, “ not so much by the common accord and consent of the Church, as by the testimony and inward illumination of the Holy Spirit, which enables us to distinguish them from other ecclesiastical books upon which, however useful, we cannot found any articles of faith.”² And, in like manner, the Westminster Confession, after speaking of the many “ incomparable excellences ” of Scripture, “ whereby it doth abundantly evidence itself to be the *Word*

¹ Quoted in C. A. Briggs' *Study of Holy Scripture*, p. 152.

² Schaff's *Creeds of the Evangelical Protestant Churches*, p. 361.

of God," continues, " yet, notwithstanding, our full persuasion and assurance of the infallible truth and divine authority thereof is from the inward work of the Holy Spirit, bearing witness by and with the Word in our hearts." ¹

Thus, to sum up the whole matter in the words of the great historian of Protestant theology, for the Church of the Reformation, " the great original certainty which attests all other truths, as it is not the authority of the Church, so also it is not the authority of the Canon of the Holy Scriptures handed down by the Church. It is rather the *subject matter of the Word of God*, which, however different may be its forms of expression, is able to attest itself to the hearts of men as the Word of God by itself and its divine power." ²

We may now see for ourselves how wholly wide of the mark is the familiar taunt that Protestantism did but substitute a paper Pope for him of Rome. In point of fact it did no such thing. Having got rid of one external authority it did not straightway put itself into bondage to another. Yet was it not therefore without authority. Free of men, it was the more bound to God. An authority that is simply imposed, a hard external thing, it would not have ; but an authority that can impose itself,

¹ Schaff's *Creeds of the Evangelical Protestant Churches*, p. 603.

² Dorner's *History of Protestant Theology*, vol. i, p. 231.

“ which can freely win the recognition and surrender of the mind and heart of man,”¹ it sought and found in that Divine Word which is the substance of all Scripture. And therefore into every man’s hands it put the open Bible, saying to him, “ Read, read for thyself, and as thou readest, if it be but with open mind and heart, the Divine Word shall verify itself. This is no matter for Pope or Council ; it lies all betwixt thyself and God. If thine own heart misgive thee, no word of man can make thee sure ; but if thou hear Him, then shalt thou need none other to tell thee, *This is the Word of God ;* then mayest thou say boldly, *This is God’s Word ; on this will I risk body and life and a hundred thousand necks if I had them.*”

II

If, now, I have at all succeeded in making plain the general attitude of the Reformers to the Bible, it should not surprise us to discover with what reverent freedom and daring they turned the searchlight of criticism upon the sacred volume. The materials for a true and complete science of Biblical criticism were not, of course, at that time available, yet no one can read the outspoken judgments of sixteenth-century Protestantism

¹ Denney’s *Studies in Theology*, p. 222.

on the Bible without seeing how near it came to anticipating some of the findings of later Biblical scholarship, and without feeling at the same time that even Luther and Calvin themselves would have fared rather badly at the hands of some of our modern Protestant ecclesiastics. Let me recall a few of their dicta by way of illustration.

All the leading Reformers admit errors in the Scriptures, but Luther goes beyond them all in the freedom, and sometimes even the recklessness, with which he expresses himself on critical questions. What matters it, he asks, even though Moses did not write the Book of Genesis ? ¹ “The discourses of the prophets,” he says, “were none of them regularly committed to writing at the time ; their disciples and hearers collected them subsequently, one one piece, another another, and thus was the complete collection formed.” ² The book of Proverbs is “a fine book,” but neither it nor Ecclesiastes is the work of Solomon.³ He has no doubt that the book of Job is a “real history” ; but, he adds, “that everything so happened, and was so done I do not believe, but think that some ingenious, pious, and learned man composed it as

¹ *Table Talk*, p. 17.

² *Ibid.*, p. 12. “The beginnings at least,” says Robertson Smith, “of an historical interpretation of prophecy are to be found in Luther’s prefaces to the German Bible.” (*Lectures and Essays*, p. 401.)

³ *Ibid.*, p. 11.

it is.”¹ He says that the books of Kings are “a hundred times better” than the Chronicles, and more to be believed.² As for Esther, he ranks it with the second book of Maccabees, and wishes it did not exist, because it Judaizes too much and contains much heathen folly.³ Nor does Luther stay his hand when he turns to the New Testament. In his translation the Epistle to the Hebrews, James, Jude, and the Apocalypse are placed by themselves at the end of the book as being, compared with the rest of the New Testament, of a lower degree of inspiration. Every one knows his almost contemptuous reference to James as “a right strawy epistle.” Of the Epistle to the Hebrews he says it was certainly not written by an apostle, but by one who built upon another’s foundation gold, silver, and precious stones: “Therefore, even if we find perhaps wood, straw, or hay mingled with it, that shall not prevent us from receiving such instruction with all honour, though we do not place it absolutely on the same footing with the Apostolic Epistles.”⁴ Jude is “undisputably an extract or abstract from the

¹ I give the passage as it is quoted in A. B. Davidson’s *Job* (Cambridge Bible), p. xiv. As he says, the passage appears to exist under various forms.

² *Table Talk*, p. 12.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 11. See also Robertson Smith’s *Answer to the Form of Libel*, p. 43.

⁴ Westcott’s *The Bible in the Church*, p. 263.

Second Epistle of St. Peter.”¹ The Apocalypse, especially, comes in for very unceremonious handling; and, though he saw reason later to modify his judgment, at one time he counted it neither apostolic nor prophetic, and of little more weight than the Second Book of Esdras. “I certainly cannot,” he says, “detect any trace of its having been inspired by the Holy Ghost.”²

Calvin’s name suggests a much more rigid type of Biblical interpretation. Yet even of him Robertson Smith declares that he has left “an ever precious example of believing courage in dealing with the Scriptures,”³ while Bishop Perowne goes so far as to say that the view which he takes of some of the Psalms “would undoubtedly expose him to the charge of rationalism were he now

¹ Westcott’s *The Bible in the Church*, p. 264.

² *Ibid.* and Hagenbach’s *History of the Reformation*, vol. i, p. 160. To the examples given in the text Dorner adds the following: “He even says of a proof led by the Apostle Paul in the Galatians, that it is too weak to hold” (*History of Protestant Theology*, vol. i, p. 243). Pfleiderer has a similar remark, *Philosophy and Development of Religion*, vol. ii, p. 159, but I have not been able to verify the reference. Luther does indeed say (in his note on Gal. iv. 24), “Allegories do not strongly persuade in divinity,” and, “if Paul had not proved the righteousness of faith against the righteousness of works by strong and pithy arguments, he should have little prevailed by this allegory” (of Hagar and Sarah); but it is noteworthy that he defended Paul’s argument in Gal. iii. 16, and we know what his own frequent practice was (see above, p. 6).

³ *Lectures and Essays*, p. 232.

alive"! ¹ We may have some hesitation about the "rationalism"—a good deal of water has run under the bridge since Perowne wrote—but there need be none about the "courage." Trifling discrepancies in the sacred narrative he treated with light-hearted unconcern. Thus, for example, commenting on Matt. xxvii. 9 (where some words which belong to Zechariah are attributed to Jeremiah), he says: "How the name of *Jeremiah* crept in, I confess that I do not know, nor do I give myself much trouble to inquire. The passage itself plainly shows that the name of Jeremiah has been put down by mistake." ² The book of Malachi he ascribed to Ezra, and Psalms xliv. and lxxiv. to the era of the Maccabees; and still more clearly do his independence and good judgment come out in his treatment of the Messianic Psalms.³ In dealing with the New Testament, as we should expect,

¹ *Book of Psalms*, vol. i, p. iv.

² Similar examples may be found in his notes on Acts vii. 14, 16.

³ "How different," writes George Adam Smith, after speaking of a certain style of exegesis which has been the besetting sin of Catholic and Protestant alike, "how different is the liberal and patient temper of Calvin! He examines every alleged type and prediction. He says this is 'too forced'; that 'too fine.' 'In these things we require, not cleverness, but *quid solidum*,' something reliable, something sane. And therefore, when he does admit a type or prophecy of Christ, he makes us sure of it. We know that he seeks to learn what God means, rather than to find what his own ingenuity can prove. He is jealous to serve his Lord with truth." (*Modern Criticism and the Preaching of the Old Testament*, p. 146.)

he is more guarded than Luther. Nevertheless, he doubted the Petrine authorship of Second Peter, and it is significant that he gives no notes on Second and Third John or on the Apocalypse in his Commentary on the New Testament, and writes of First John as simply "the Epistle of John."¹

Now, of course, to those to whom the whole duty of Protestantism is summed up in the saying, Thou shalt love the Bible and hate the Pope, all this will seem startling and revolutionary. It is none the less wholly consistent with the true and original Protestant position. In the Bible the Reformers found Christ; in Him they were made sure of God's love to them. But a book which brought them great gifts like these could need no outward guarantee. Rather it was itself thereby guaranteed. Such a book shone in its own light; it stood fast in its own strength. And if some parts of it lacked the guarantee, why then, as Luther said, "A council cannot make that to be of Scripture which is not by nature of Scripture," and he cared not what befell them. But of this he was sure, that the Bible does speak to the heart of man in words that can only come from God, and that nothing can deprive us of this conviction or make less precious the divine utterances that

¹ Westcott's *The Bible in the Church*, p. 271.

speak straight to the heart.¹ And it was this fearless confidence in the substance of Scripture which delivered him from that murderous tenacity about trifles which has been the bane of the Churches of Protestantism. The eagle that soars near the sun is not concerned about how it will cross the streams.

III

It is a great descent to pass from the sixteenth to the seventeenth century. Luther's was the golden age of Protestantism. But, alas, the fine gold was soon exchanged for dull lead, Christian liberty for the bondage of a hard scholasticism. When we reach the Swiss *Formula Consensus*, in 1675, the darkness can be felt ; we are in the Middle Ages of Protestantism. The seventeenth century was a century of violent controversy and rigid definition. "Methods of interpretation really inconsistent with Protestantism crept back in detail."² The limits of the Canon were once more traced with unwavering lines.³ The old misconception of the Bible as a statute-book of doctrine and morality

¹ See Robertson Smith's *Old Testament in the Jewish Church*, p. 19.

² Robertson Smith's *Lectures and Essays*, p. 402.

³ Cp., for example, the certainty of the Westminster divines with the uncertainty of Luther and Calvin.

once more gained possession of men's minds. Compared with the Reformed Symbols, the doctrinal formulas of the seventeenth century are harsh and stiff. They reveal rather the logical understanding than the glowing heart. The nadir is reached in the Swiss *Formula* already referred to, which asserted the inspiration and absolute accuracy of even the vowel-points of the Massoretic text of the Old Testament.¹

This decline of the true Protestant spirit is not difficult to understand. The early Reformers, in the strength of their own personal experience of religion, gained for themselves the true point of view for a just interpretation of Scripture. But the whole realm of exegesis and criticism could not be revolutionized in a day. Nor was it to be expected that all their followers would share their deep spiritual insight. Even Luther and Calvin themselves, as we have already seen, were often unable to break through the steel mesh of men's tradition. Moreover, in the seventeenth century, circumstances conspired to drive Protestantism back from the outposts won by the heroism of its first leaders. It was a century of sharp and angry polemics. Protestantism was fiercely assailed on every side. Rome harassed it on the one flank, Socinianism on the other. The activity of the

¹ Schaff's *History of the Creeds of Christendom*, p. 479.

Jesuits was unceasing. Protestantism could only hold its hard-won territory at the price of sleepless vigilance. Is it any marvel, especially when we remember that to ordinary human nature it always seems easier to defend what it is easy to define, that Protestantism abandoned its front line of defence and fell back within the safer because the more familiar lines of authority, and over against an infallible Pope set up an infallible book ?

It is not, perhaps, to be marvelled at ; it is none the less to be regretted. To this day our teeth are being set on edge by the sour fruit of Protestant scholasticism. When, for example, men talk about the supposed perfections of Scripture “as originally given,” claiming infallibility, not indeed for the Bible as we have it, but for some imaginary autograph which no man ever has seen or can see ; or when, again, they seek to establish the book’s authority by evidence which belongs to the sphere of literary and historical fact, rather than of faith, they show themselves no longer in the true Protestant succession of Luther and Calvin, but rather the descendants of their less discerning sons of the seventeenth century. Another sign of the same evil inheritance may be traced in the false and overstrained typology of some modern evangelicals. Interpreters of this school usually belong to the straitest sect of Protestants, yet, little as they

realize it, they are in fact helping to perpetuate what is essentially the mediæval as opposed to the Reformation idea of Scripture. The Bible, for them, is simply a storehouse of infallible truths about God and His salvation, and, as Professor Lindsay says, they use typology "in much the same way as the mediæval theologians employed the fourfold sense, to extract doctrinal truths from unlikely sources, such as the description of the Temple and its furniture."¹ Not until Protestantism has the courage to plant its feet firmly on the first principles of Reformation doctrine will it be able finally to rid itself of this dreary incubus of mediæval exegesis.

IV

And this leads me to point out, in conclusion, how urgent is our need of Reformation principles to-day if we are to deal truly alike with Scripture and our Protestant freedom.

We need them, in the first place, for the dispersing of the clouds of suspicion which still hang about the science of Biblical Criticism. Reformation principles, rightly understood, not only give right of way to the critic, they call for him, they

¹ See a most suggestive article, "Professor W. Robertson Smith's Doctrine of Scripture," *Expositor*, Fourth Series, vol. x, pp. 241-64.

make his work a necessity. For if, as the Reformers never wearied of insisting, the Bible is not a body of abstract religious truth, but the record of God's gracious self-revelation in history, such a record must admit of investigation according to the recognized methods of historical research. Nor can the findings of honest and impartial inquiry in any wise affect the authority with which the Bible speaks to the souls of men to-day. Whether, for example, there be any, and if so how much, history in the book of Genesis, whether the legislation of the Pentateuch is Mosaic or not in its origin, whether David wrote any Psalms, whether St. Paul is the author of all the letters which the New Testament attributes to him—all these are questions to be determined by the ordinary methods of literary and historical study. And, whatever the answers to them may be, those to whom the Bible is what it was to the Reformers—God's self-authenticating message to the human soul—will not be put to shame. When, therefore, Professor Gwatkin says, "Criticism has demolished alike the Catholic assumption of an infallible Church and the Protestant assumption of an infallible Book,"¹ his words need very careful qualification. Later Protestant assumptions of a particular kind of infallibility criticism has un-

¹ *The Knowledge of God*, vol. ii, p. 289.

doubtedly demolished. But against the only kind of infallibility that Luther claimed for the Bible—the infallibility of the Divine Word of which the book is the bearer—criticism is as powerless as a sword against a sunbeam. Criticism, once more be it said, is but the attempt to learn the witness of Scripture to itself; where it errs it must be corrected; when it goes beyond its own province and assumes an authority to which it has no right, it must be sternly thrust back; but where it is about its own business they who would stifle it with ecclesiastical authority are but repeating the blunder of those who sought in vain to silence the monk of Erfurt.

Further, it is by a return to the first principles of Protestantism that we can most effectually silence the taunts of our foes, and at the same time bring relief to the overburdened minds and hearts of many of our friends. So long as we find the ultimate authority of our religion in a book, so long—in other words—as the foundations of our faith are not really religious but rather literary and historical, what answer can we make to writers like Dr. Martineau, who tell us that we are at the mercy of learned inquiries which by their very nature are wholly beyond the reach of the vast majority of mankind? If the Bible is the kind of book that Protestants in a mistaken zeal

have often declared it to be, then criticism must work its whole work upon it before it can be available for my use—which is only another way of saying that I can never use it at all. But if, on the other hand, it is what the Reformers believed it to be, then it is available now and always. Criticism is indeed free to do its own work, but I have not to wait for its findings before I can trust my soul to Him whose word of grace the book speaks to my heart. On this eternal reality, a divine message which surely authenticates itself to those who meet it with a trustful mind and an obedient heart, let us boldly stake the whole issue. Hitherto we have wasted our strength on indefensible outworks; let us call off our forces and concentrate them in the citadel; and in so doing we shall both bring to an end much futile controversy—for men will not long go on shelling an empty fortress—and we shall quiet the fears of multitudes who, because they know that the outworks can no longer be held, often tremble for the citadel itself.

It will, of course, be said, as it has been said so often, that all this leads straight to a ruinous subjectivity. If we have no authority certified by adequate external guarantees, if that alone is true for us which appeals to us as truth, what is this but “a subjecting, not of ourselves to Scripture,

but of Scripture to ourselves" ? ¹ And, undoubtedly, the gift of liberty means here, as everywhere, the perils of liberty. When we cut our cables and leave the quiet water of the land-locked harbour it is to face the dangers as well as the glories of the deep. No man knew the risks he ran better than Luther, or hesitated less. And are the risks so great, after all ? or is this charge of subjectivity quite the formidable thing it is made to appear ? It is urged against the Lutheran position that it reduces the standard of truth to that which appeals to us individually. But, as Dr. Denney says,² is not this as if one should say that I do not see, or do not see truly, because I only see with my own eyes ? What other kind of real seeing is possible to me ? And how can the Bible speak with authority—with authority to me—except in so far as in it I find God and God finds me ? But this does not at all mean that I am making my own spiritual perceptions the measure of all things. If I am shown one of the world's great pictures, and am told that it has commanded the wonder and admiration of those best able to judge, in many nations and for many generations, I must indeed see its beauty for myself before I can

¹ The phrase is Martineau's : *The Seat of Authority in Religion*, p. 175.

² *The Atonement and the Modern Mind*, p. 10.

honestly profess to admire it ; but, if I cannot see it, I conclude that it is my own perception which is at fault, and I sit down before the picture hoping that the power that is in it will some day call forth in me the power to appreciate it.¹ And so, when I am told that the Bible is, in a sense that belongs to no other book, the Word of God, I cannot receive the saying merely on the authority of another, not even of the Apostles, nor of Christ Himself ; for me it is God's Word only as I hear God speaking in it. Yet here again, in the presence of such a book, coming to me with such a history, I sit down with a humble and obedient heart that to me also it may be given to say, *Now I believe, not because of thy speaking ; but because I have heard for myself and know that this is indeed the Word of God which liveth and abideth for ever.*

¹ The illustration is Dr. Dale's.

II

THE PROBLEM OF DEMONIAL POSSESSION IN THE GOSPELS

II

THE PROBLEM OF DEMONIACAL POSSESSION IN THE GOSPELS

THERE are few more perplexing problems for the student of the Gospels to-day than that which is raised by the frequent narratives which tell of the healing by Christ of them that were “possessed with devils.” On such a dark and mysterious topic no one would wish to write without keeping in mind every moment Butler’s always needed warning of the limitations of our knowledge. Any suggestions that he may make he would desire to make tentatively and modestly, remembering into what vast, unexplored areas the subject leads him, and how much easier it is to ask questions than to answer them. At the same time it ought to be possible for a reverent inquirer frankly and fearlessly to pursue his inquiries without exposing himself to ugly suspicions in the minds of those who reject without hesitation his provisional conclusions. This also he would ask—this also the present writer desires to ask for himself—that

he be held responsible only for what he does say, and not for what he does not say. Hasty readers are often prone to charge against one from whom they differ all the conclusions which *they* imagine to be involved in his position, but which he himself would entirely repudiate. With this preliminary word of caution, let us turn to find what light we can on the dark problem of demoniacal possession.

I

And, at the outset, it will be well to remind ourselves how large a place the subject fills in the brief records of our Lord's life. Suppose, by way of example, we take the briefest and earliest of these—St. Mark's Gospel—and note in order the Evangelist's references.

The first chapter alone contains a threefold record of Christ's victorious activity against the evil spirits : first, in the synagogue at Capernaum, where was *a man with an unclean spirit* (v. 23) ; then, in the evening of the same day, when *they brought unto Him all that were sick, and them that were possessed with devils. . . . And He healed many that were sick with divers diseases, and cast out many devils ; and He suffered not the devils to speak, because they knew Him* (vv. 32–4) ; and finally, in *their synagogues throughout Galilee*, whither He

went, *preaching and casting out devils* (v. 39); insomuch that all men marvelled, saying, *With authority He commandeth even the unclean spirits, and they obey Him* (v. 27). In the third chapter we read how *the unclean spirits, whenever they beheld Him, fell down before Him and cried, saying, Thou art the Son of God* (v. 11); how Jesus appointed twelve, that they might be with Him, and that He might send them forth to preach, and to have authority to cast out devils (vv. 14, 15); and how the scribes which came down from Jerusalem declared, *He hath Beelzebub, and, By the prince of the devils casteth He out devils* (v. 22). Chapter five tells of the healing of the Gadarene demoniac and the destruction of the herd of swine (vv. 1–20); chapter six of the sending forth of the Twelve armed with the authority of Jesus over the unclean spirits, and of the success which attended their labours (vv. 7, 13). In chapter seven we have the story of the Syrophœnician woman whose great faith secured for her little daughter deliverance from the devil that vexed her (vv. 25–30); and in chapter nine of the casting out of the dumb and deaf spirit at the foot of the Mount of Transfiguration (vv. 14–29). This chapter also tells how when John saw one casting out devils in Christ's name he forbade him, but Jesus said, *Forbid him not* (vv. 38, 39).

This completes the list of Mark's undoubted references to the subject of demoniacal possession. To these may be added the allusion to Mary Magdalene *from whom He had cast out seven devils*, and the saying of Jesus concerning the eleven disciples, *in My name shall they cast out devils*, which are to be found in the doubtful verses with which our versions of the second Gospel close. Even yet, perhaps, the list is not quite complete. Some expositors think that the similarity of the language used by Jesus when He stilled the tempest (Mark iv. 39 : ἐπετίμησεν τῷ ἀνέμῳ καὶ εἶπεν τῇ θαλάσσῃ, Σιώπα πεφίμωσο), and where He rebuked the demoniac of Capernaum (Mark i. 25 : ἐπετίμησεν αὐτῷ ὁ Ἰησοῦς, λέγων, Φιμώθητι), points to a belief in a storm-fiend of whose tempestuous wrath the angry seas were the visible symbol.¹ This is perhaps ingenious rather than convincing. Nevertheless, if we take the large mass of indisputable evidence which, as we have seen, is afforded by St. Mark's Gospel, and supplement it by further

¹ *Dictionary of Christ and the Gospels*, vol. i, p. 441. "Even high fever," says the writer of the article, "Demon, Devil," in Hastings' *Bible Dictionary*, "is attributed to demoniacal agency, as we can clearly infer from the fact that, in the case of Peter's mother-in-law, Jesus stood over her and *rebuked* the fever which possessed her (Luke iv. 38, 39; cp. xiii. 16)." Possibly; but some readers will question the "clearness" of the inference.

Deissmann finds a reference to demoniac influence in Mark vii. 35 (*the bond of his tongue was loosed*): *New Light on the New Testament*, p. 84.

sayings and incidents recorded only in the other Gospels, we see at once how very real and considerable is the problem which is thus put into our hands for solution.

II

What, then, is the problem ? In a word, it is this : that forms of disease which, judging from their symptoms as described in the Gospels, we should to-day unhesitatingly classify as epilepsy or lunacy, are attributed by the Evangelists to the direct agency of evil spirits. We seem, therefore, shut up to this alternative : we may accept the New Testament diagnosis as accurate, and declare our belief in the reality of demoniacal possession, or we may see in the language of the Gospels only the reflection of the popular but wholly unscientific conceptions of the age in which they were written, “ a theory for explaining certain morbid symptoms which are now accounted for otherwise.” Such is our problem ; and in discussing it we must take care to avoid trespassing in neighbouring but really alien territory. We have nothing to do just now with the problem of the miraculous. I assume the reality alike of the diseases with which the demoniacs were afflicted and of the cures wrought upon them by Christ and His apostles. Our only

question is concerning the meaning of the language in which both are described ; to whatever conclusion we may come, the question of the miraculous will remain exactly where it was.

Now, of course, if any one says that he finds no difficulty in believing that victims of acute nervous disorders, such as epilepsy and lunacy, may be under the direct influence of evil spirits, and that inasmuch as the New Testament seems clearly to imply that such was the case in the life-time of our Lord, he therefore accepts the doctrine without further questioning—in such a case there is no more to be said. No one, I imagine, would be so foolish as to suppose that he could *prove* that evil spirits do not exist, or that, if they exist, they do not exert any malignant influence over human beings. Moreover, as Dr. Sanday suggests,¹ the physical and moral spheres may be more intimately connected than we suppose, and unbridled wickedness may have physical effects which are not unfitly described as the work of demons. If, therefore, a man elect to intrench himself behind considerations of this nature, fortified by what is, undoubtedly, the *prima facie* evidence of the Gospels, he will be well out of reach of any difficulties that the modern mind may suggest ; for him, indeed, our problem can hardly be said to exist at all.

¹ *Outlines of the Life of Christ*, p. 103,

On the other hand, there are multitudes to whom, on such terms, no peace of mind is ever possible. They are driven by a kind of intellectual necessity to seek reasonable grounds for all that they hold as true. Not because they have lost the spirit of reverence—rather, because they revere the truth above all things—they insist that even the Gospel story must submit itself to the same searching tests as men to-day are everywhere applying to records of the past. It is not to be wondered at, therefore, if many hesitate to believe that mental and physical phenomena which, if they occurred in the twentieth century, would at once be attributed to nervous disorders, were in the first century due to the agency of demons. They find it difficult to shake off the suspicion that if, for example, a modern medical practitioner had been an eyewitness of the healing of the Gadarene demoniac, he would have given us a very different account of what happened.¹ And when, further, it appears that in the days of our Lord, not only among the Jews but also among the Greeks and Romans, the belief in demons as the active source of various bodily ailments was widely current, scepticism easily passes into settled unbelief.

The belief in the malignant activity of evil

¹ See Sanday's *Outlines*, p. 104.

spirits in the time of our Lord was, I say, very widespread. As this statement has a very obvious bearing upon our interpretation of the New Testament narratives of demoniacal possession, it will be well to pause at this point for a moment in order to bring forward a few facts in illustration and proof of it.

1. In the first place, anthropologists tell us that at certain early stages in the development of civilization, and among savage races even to-day, the belief in demons is practically universal. "All primitive peoples," says Robertson Smith, "believe in frequent theophanies, or at least in frequent occasions of personal contact between men and superhuman powers. When all nature is mysterious and full of unknown activities, any natural object or occurrence which appeals strongly to the imagination, or excites sentiments of awe and reverence, is readily taken for a manifestation of divine or demoniac life."¹ "Primitive man," says another writer, "dwelt in a cosmic society of superhuman agencies, some of which ministered to his well-being and others to his injury. . . . Hurricane, lightning, sunstroke, plague, flood, and earthquake were ascribed to wrathful personal agencies, whose malignity man would endeavour to avert or appease."²

¹ *Religion of the Semites*, p. 119.

² *Hastings' Bible Dictionary*, vol. i, p. 590.

2. Similar beliefs are also to be found even among peoples who have attained a comparatively high degree of culture. Thus, for example, to the heathen Arabs nature is full of superhuman beings. So thickly, indeed, do they people the desert with their *Jinn*, or demons, that they apologize to them on throwing anything away, lest they should hit some of them ! “ So, when throwing water on the ground, or entering a bath, or letting a bucket down into a well, or entering the place of uncleanness, a well-bred son of the desert will say, ‘ Permission, ye blessed ! ’ ” “ The genii of the Babylonians swarmed everywhere ; creeping under the door, filling every nook and corner from floor to roof-tree ; hiding in lonely places ; lurking behind walls and hedges, or roosting among trees. . . . The modern Arab, Hindoo, and Chinaman hear the voices of evil demons in the weird sounds of the night. Even the Finlander still listens for the call of spirits in his native forests.” ¹ Peculiarly intimate is the association of demoniacal activity and various forms of disease. According to the Egyptians, the human body was composed of thirty-six parts, and each part was under the dominion of a demon, its health depending on the demon’s good will. “ The Babylonians believed

¹ Menzies Alexander’s *Demonic Possession*, pp. 43, 45. Cp. also *Religion of the Semites*, p. 119.

that the inhalation or swallowing of stray demons was the cause of disease. The Parsee knows that Angro-Mainyu (= the Evil One) has one hundred thousand diseases, *less one*, wherewith to vex mankind. The Burman refers his fever to the demon of the jungle; the Arab his insanity, or epilepsy, to the Jinn; the New Zealander, his headache to Tonga.”¹

3. Such being the ideas prevalent amongst other peoples, including Israel's own Semitic kinsfolk, it cannot surprise us to find the Jews sharing in this respect in the common superstitions of mankind. The subject of Jewish demonology is far too vast to be discussed here. Those who are interested may be referred to the articles in Hastings' *Bible Dictionary* and *Dictionary of Christ and the Gospels*, or to Dr. W. M. Alexander's treatise, *Demonic Possession*. Suffice it to say that, while it is impossible to doubt “that the Israelites from the earliest times, like every other race, peopled the world with innumerable unseen powers,” the development of their doctrine received an immense impetus, first, from Babylonian and Persian influences during the period of exile, and, later on, from the elaborate and daring speculations of the Rabbis; with the result that, by the time of our Lord, the idea of demoniacal possession had

¹ *Demonic Possession*, p. 46.

rooted itself not only in popular belief, but in science and philosophy. "Body and soul alike were believed to be open to the invasion of demons, moral excesses as well as physical distempers being ascribed to their malign influence. There were lying spirits, unclean spirits, deceiving spirits. Nowhere, however, was possession so plainly and appallingly recognized as in raving madness and in epilepsy with its paroxysms of foaming and choking."¹ The strange story in the book of Acts (ch. xix.) of certain strolling Jews who practised the arts of the professional exorcist, and the question of our Lord to His enemies, *By whom do your sons cast them out?* (Matt. xii. 27), each affords a glimpse of the popular belief, and of the means that were used to outwit the cunning of the powers of darkness.

It thus becomes plain that the idea of demoniacal possession which meets us so often in the Gospels is no isolated phenomenon. On the contrary, it is but one link in a vast chain which stretches along a large part of the course of human history. The demonology of the Gospels, it cannot be denied, presents an unmistakable family likeness, not only to the current beliefs of Judaism, but to the superstitions of the wider world beyond. "Likeness," of course, does not tell the whole truth

¹ David Smith's *The Days of His Flesh*, p. 105.

concerning the demoniac narratives of the New Testament. Indeed, no wider contrast could well be imagined than that which is presented by the sobriety, the sanity, the sympathy with human suffering, which mark the Gospel stories, and the folly, the grotesqueness, the general unsavouriness, which characterize the subject of demonology as a whole. Nevertheless, it still remains true, as a writer already quoted says, that the demonology of the New Testament is, “in all its broad characteristics, the demonology of the contemporary Judaism stripped of its cruder and exaggerated features.”¹

On the whole, therefore—though dogmatism in dealing with such a dark and mysterious subject is but another name for folly—the conclusion to which the foregoing facts seem to point is this: belief in the general historical credibility of the Gospels (which the present writer holds very strongly) does not commit us to belief in the reality of demoniacal possession. The New Testament writers, in this as in other matters, think the thoughts and speak the language of the men of their own time. What did happen—and of this there can be no reasonable doubt—was that persons suffering from certain very real and terrible maladies, which are diagnosed according to the fantastic

¹ Hastings' *Bible Dictionary*, vol. i, p. 593.

notions of an unscientific age, were restored to sanity and strength by the gracious might of the Divine Healer.¹

III

In what has been said, or rather suggested, thus far, there can be nothing, I think, to disturb the mind of the devout reader of the Gospels. Once we realize how large a place the idea of demoniacal possession has filled in human thought, it can hardly perplex us to find it shared by the people of the New Testament. And, on the other hand, there must be many to whom it will come with a very real sense of relief to discover that, in order to retain their faith in the Gospels, they are no

¹ Mr. T. R. Glover arrives at what is substantially the same conclusion: "In the early days of the Christian Church, in the Mediterranean world, as to-day among the animistic peoples, we find the minds of men infested with a belief, which to us is almost incomprehensible, in a world of spiritual beings, or demons, as the Greeks called them. . . . Traces of the demon belief, common to Jews as well as Gentiles, abound in the New Testament. . . . Now let us sum up the matter. We shall not be in a hurry to commit ourselves to the belief that there are such powers of evil about us, though men who know Paganism at first hand sometimes lean to the idea, and modern science has no evidence that they do not exist, and is indeed invoked (not very skilfully) to explain them. But we shall note that, whatever the truth about demons, where Jesus Christ comes in any real way into the hearts of men, He liberates them from all fears of supernatural enemies" (*The Christian Tradition and its Verification*, pp. 144, 149, 151).

longer under the necessity of seeking to piece together the fragments of an exploded superstition.

But for the New Testament student, who accepts, as the present writer does, unreservedly, with his whole mind and heart, the Church's faith concerning Jesus Christ, the most difficult aspect of the problem still remains to be faced. Did Jesus share the popular belief concerning demons? And, if He did, must we who believe in Him believe in them likewise? There are, it will be observed, two questions, and it will be well to keep them separate. One is a question of fact: Did Jesus believe in demoniacal possession? The other is a question of inference: If Jesus believed, must we believe with Him? Let us take the question of fact first.

Unfortunately, a decisive answer is not possible. The Gospel narratives impress different minds differently. Some see in them conclusive evidence that, though Christ "graciously accommodated Himself to the popular idea, he did not Himself share it."¹ Others, with equal confidence, declare that our Lord and His apostles "could not speak of demons entering into a man, or being cast out of him, without pledging themselves to the belief of an actual possession of the man by the demons."²

¹ *The Days of His Flesh*, p. 108.

² Quoted from the *Biblical Cyclopædia* in Huxley's *Science and Christian Tradition*, p. 217.

In the presence of such conflicting opinions, put forward by men equally loyal to the evangelical faith, it behoves every man to regard his own judgment with diffidence, and his neighbour's with charity. For myself, I can only say that the impression which the words of Jesus on this subject make on my own mind is that of one whose thoughts and point of view were, in the main, those of His hearers, and that, had I been among those who heard His words and saw His works, I should have gone away with my old belief in the reality of demoniacal possession unchanged, and even unchallenged. This does not, of course, in itself imply that Jesus really shared the popular belief ; it may only mean, in the words just quoted, that He "graciously accommodated Himself to it." Nor do I wish to suggest that such a conception is unworthy of our blessed Lord ; I set it aside only because it appears rather of the nature of an after-thought designed to safeguard His authority than a deduction from the sacred record itself ; it is read into the narrative rather than found there. On every ground, therefore, it seems to me to be wiser to keep close to the revealed facts, to say boldly that our sources represent Christ as really sharing the popular belief concerning demons, and then to face the consequences of our admission, whatever they may be. What these are, we shall see in a moment.

Assuming, then, that we have obtained at least a provisional answer to our first question, we may now take up the second : Is Christ's belief authoritative for us ? To two classes of persons, approaching the subject from directly opposite points of view, the question presents no difficulty whatever. In the eyes of some, Jesus is only the greatest of our religious teachers ; and though, within His own province, He speaks as one having authority, on a subject of this kind it is as irrelevant to quote Him as it would be to quote the opinion of Shakespeare (if he had one) on the trade relations of Great Britain with the rest of the world. On a question of moral duty, Jesus is to be listened to ; on this matter, He is simply to be ignored. To others, again, the answer is equally simple, but it is exactly opposite. In their eyes Jesus is not only the Prophet of Nazareth : he is the Son of God, the Lord of glory, who speaks at all times with divine authority, whose every word is final. To them it is incredible that on such a subject as that of evil spirits He should not have known the real truth, and if His words indicate His belief in demoniacal possession, then—*cadit quæstio*, there is no more to be said ; the popular belief was the true belief, let science anathematize as it will.

It is with the position of the latter of these two groups only that we are concerned at this moment ;

for it is just here, for the Christian believer, that the crux of the whole difficulty lies. As Dr. Bruce says, it is the impression that the character of Christ is in some way involved, which, more than anything else, leads devout minds to regard the reality of demoniacal possession as a matter not open to dispute.¹ Is there, then, no escape from the dilemma? Must we believe in demons, or renounce the authority of Christ? Again, let us remind ourselves that this is an inquiry in which a confident and shortsighted dogmatism—confident only because it is shortsighted—cannot help us. Our discussion has led us to one of the most tangled thickets of modern theology; and the light-hearted pioneer who gaily offers, with one or two deft strokes of his axe, to make a clearing through the bush, and assures us that if we will only follow him all will be well, is to be distrusted as a guide, if indeed he is not to be laughed at as a fool.

The problem in the form in which it now faces us is really part of a very much larger problem. It involves the whole question of the limitations of our Lord's knowledge during his earthly life. Now, unless we are prepared to set aside the Gospel narratives altogether in favour of theories of the Person of Christ constructed out of our own heads,

¹ *The Miraculous Element in the Gospels*, p. 182.

it is impossible to deny that *some* limitations there must have been. What the Gospels depict is the life of One who was not God only, nor man only, but the God-man ; in other words, it is “ the divine nature acting under conditions of manhood ” which they show us, rather than “ the divine nature *per se*.”¹ Indeed, it is difficult to see how any one can deny this without emptying the Incarnation of all reality. Nor are we left to the precarious guidance of a theological induction. If there is one saying attributed by our Gospels to Jesus concerning the genuineness of which critics of all schools are agreed, it is that recorded in Mark xiii. 32 : *Of that day or that hour knoweth no one, not even the angels in heaven, neither the Son, but the Father.* This is surely decisive. If we had nothing more, this saying would be sufficient to show the mistaken zeal of those who would clothe Christ during His earthly life with all the attributes of absolute Deity. But, as every reader of the Gospels knows, this is far from being all. Jesus, we are told, *advanced in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man* (Luke ii. 52) ; he expressed surprise ; he asked information ; He prayed, as one to whom the future is not clear, *If it be possible, let this cup pass away from Me* ; He lived, as we His servants should, a life of humble and daily dependence upon

¹ The language is Bishop Gore's : *Dissertations*, p. 165.

God.¹ These things the Gospels tell us. We may find difficulty in conceiving how they can be, and we may feel ourselves utterly incapable of basing upon them any self-consistent theory of Christ's knowledge. But at this moment theories are not our concern ; our business is with facts, and the facts tell us plainly that our common assumption of the divine omniscience of Jesus finds no warrant in the four Gospels.² Nor is the truth of this conclusion in any wise challenged by great words of the Epistles which tell us that in Christ *dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily*, that in Him

¹ For detailed illustration of what is here stated summarily, the reader may be referred to Gore's *Dissertations*, or Garvie's *Inner Life of Jesus*.

² It is in the fictitious fringes which human ingenuity has woven on to our Gospels, not in the Gospels themselves, that such ideas find any support. For example, this is what we read in the account of Christ among the doctors in *The Arabic Gospel of the Infancy*: "When a certain astronomer, who was present, asked the Lord Jesus whether He had studied astronomy, the Lord Jesus replied, and told him the number of the spheres and of the heavenly bodies, as also their triangular, square, and sextile aspect ; their progressive and retrograde motion ; their size and several prognostications ; and other things which the reason of man had never discovered. There was also among them a philosopher well skilled in physic and natural philosophy, who asked the Lord Jesus whether he had studied physic. He replied, and explained to him physics and metaphysics ; also those things which are above and below the power of Nature ; the powers also of the body, its humours and their effects" ; and so on, and so on. Who does not feel, after this, how infinitely more impressive is the reverent silence and reserve of the four Gospels ?

are all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge hidden (Col. ii. 9, 3). These sayings refer to Christ, not in His humiliation, but in His exaltation and glory. We conclude, therefore, despite the grudging and reluctant admissions of many theologians, both ancient and modern, and the positive denials of others, that, the Gospels themselves being witness, there were real limitations to our Lord's knowledge, there were some things which He did not know.

It will now become clear in what direction these various considerations are leading us. We have seen good reason for thinking that, on the subject of demoniacal possession, Jesus shared the common belief of His age. We have further seen that the Gospels, while unmistakably revealing and proclaiming Him as divine, yet exhibit His divinity in such a way, so conditioned by the limitations of His manhood, as expressly to exclude the idea of omniscience. There is, therefore, nothing inconsistent with the full faith of the New Testament concerning Christ in supposing that His belief in demons was only a segment of that circle of ideas which He accepted in becoming man, "in the same way in which He accepted a particular language with its grammar and vocabulary."¹ Thoughtless persons sometimes speak as if it would make no difference in our study of the life of our Lord, if

¹ Sanday's *Outlines*, p. 103.

He had been born in England or America, and in our day, instead of in Palestine nineteen centuries ago. They assume that to Him nothing could have been unknown then which has since become known to us, and consequently that the findings of modern historical criticism and physical science cannot be final if they are contrary to any word of His. But this is surely a way of thinking about the Incarnation which can be justified neither by Scripture nor reason. Christ, our ancient creed teaches us, "was made man," but not "man" simply; He was born a man of a particular race, and at a particular period in the world's history. In other words, the Incarnation is an event in time, and as such must be interpreted in the light of the history to which it belongs. Whatever may be known of the nature of our Lord's human consciousness must be sought for, not along the hazardous heights of abstract speculation, but by the lowly path of simple fidelity to the facts of the New Testament story. And with every step along that path the conviction slowly strengthens that on matters such as this now under discussion, the thoughts of Jesus were, in the main, the thoughts of His contemporaries. For example, even the most orthodox theologians to-day are coming to recognize alike the futility and the folly of the appeal to Christ against the conclusions of modern Biblical criticism.

Thus, it is admitted that Christ believed that David wrote Psalm cx.¹; none the less, the question of authorship still remains open, to be determined by the ordinary methods of critical inquiry. "It was," says Dr. Denney, "part of His true humanity that He should think on such questions as others in His situation naturally thought."² And the argument which holds good in the case of the authorship of a psalm may, with equal reasonableness, be extended to the belief in demons. "Even if Jesus shared the common belief regarding demoniac possession," writes Dr. Garvie, "pathology does not fall within the scope of the divine revelation given in Him, but is an earthly knowledge with which His heavenly wisdom has no direct connection. Even the belief in angels and demons, so far as Jesus may have shared it, was received by Him from His temporary and local environment; it is not an essential element in the revelation that He as Son received from His Father; it is never claimed by Him as distinctive of His teaching; it is never required of His disciples as necessary to their faith in Him. In this matter the authority of Jesus forges no fetter, and imposes no burden, on the Christian reason and conscience."³

¹ Mark xii. 35-7.

² *Expositor*, Fifth Series, vol. iii, p. 448.

³ *The Inner Life of Jesus*, ch. xii. Cp. the interesting note in Romanes' *Thoughts on Religion*, p. 180. Dr. David Smith, as we

It is in this direction, then, that the reverent thought of our time is seeking an answer to the questions—the inevitable questions—which are raised by the modern study of New Testament demonology. Of course, it is not to be expected that this method of meeting the difficulty will at once command universal assent ; it cuts too sharply across the grain of ancient theological prejudice. “ How is it possible,” men will still continue to ask, “ if Jesus were the Son of God, that He should know no more than His contemporaries concerning the authorship of Psalm cx., or of the reality of demoniacal possession ? If He really were the incarnate God, He *must* have known the truth concerning these things.” The argument wears a very plausible look, and to some Christian minds it may even seem to be conclusive. Nevertheless, it is to be resisted to the uttermost, for it proceeds upon a radically vicious assumption. “ If Christ

have already seen, prefers to think that Christ accommodated Himself to current theories rather than shared them ; yet, even if the latter supposition be the true one, “ there is,” he says, “ perhaps no real occasion for disquietude. When the Lord of glory came down to earth, He assumed the nature of the children of men, being ‘ made at every point like unto His brethren ’ ; and it might be accepted as a welcome evidence of the reality of the Incarnation if He were found to have shared the scientific and metaphysical conceptions of His contemporaries” (*The Days of His Flesh*, p. 106). See also *Dictionary of Christ and the Gospels*, vol. i, p. 148 (Denney), and Garvie’s *Christian Certainty and Modern Perplexity*, p. 184.

were the Son of God, He *must* have known this, that, or the other": why that "must"? What right has that word on our lips? Who are we that we should presume to say under what conditions, if it please God to become man, the divine self-revelation shall take place? It argues, as Butler would say, the most amazing "shortness of thought," for beings such as we are to imagine for one moment that we are competent to determine beforehand what shall or shall not be involved in such an act as the Incarnation of the Son of God. Let us tell ourselves plainly that these *a priori* assumptions, which some of us make and maintain with such cheerful confidence, are gratuitous impertinences, and that, until we abandon them, all our thinking on these high themes will be but a restless pacing to and fro within an intellectual *cul-de-sac*. What "must be" or "must not be," where God is involved, is a matter upon which the wisest of us is not entitled to so much even as an opinion. Speculation on that matter will carry us no nearer to the truth than running up the front staircase will take us nearer to the stars. No; instead of vainly discussing what must have been, let us patiently and humbly seek to learn what was; and when we have found the facts, let us give all diligence to fit our language faithfully to them. All of which, being interpreted and applied to the

matter in hand, means this : The nature of Christ's belief concerning demons can never be reached by any deductive reasoning which starts out from the premiss that He was the Son of God ; it must be determined, if it can be determined at all, by the evidence of the Gospel narratives. If this is insufficient, we shall wisely suspend our judgment ; but, sufficient or insufficient, its force, whatever it may be, is not to be weakened by any appeal in the supposed interests of some theory of the Person of the God-man. Neither in religion nor philosophy has abstract reasoning any validity against facts.

It is this cardinal fact which seems to have been overlooked by some eminent writers, who, while freely admitting, and indeed defending, the limitations of Christ's knowledge during His earthly life, as a general principle, deny the legitimacy of its application in the case before us. Meyer, for example, says that, if we assume that Jesus Himself shared the opinion of His age and nation regarding the reality of demoniacal possession, we are at once confronted with this dilemma : either we must try to set up again, on the authority of Christ, the old dead doctrine of demoniacal activity, or else we must attribute to Him an erroneous belief of such a kind as " would be irreconcilable with the pure height of the Lord's divine knowledge." ¹

¹ *Commentary on St. Matthew*, vol. i, p. 151.

But what is this but just Butler's "shortness of thought" over again? How do we know what is, or is not, reconcilable with the knowledge of such a divine person as we believe Jesus Christ to have been? We simply cannot know anything of the kind. Our one concern, I repeat, is not with what could be, or could not be, but with what was; and if the facts of the Gospel narratives, honestly interpreted, declare that in this thing the thoughts of Jesus were as the thoughts of other men, then there is no higher court, theological or philosophical, to which we can appeal against their decision.¹

¹ Bishop Gore's attitude on this question is somewhat perplexing. No one has shown more convincingly than he that the facts of our Lord's life lead us to the conclusion that "within the *sphere* and *period* of His incarnate and mortal life, He did, and as it would appear did habitually—doubtless by the voluntary action of His own self-limiting and self-restraining love—cease from the exercise of those divine functions and powers, including the divine omniscience, which would have been incompatible with a truly human experience" (*Dissertations*, p. 94); no one has protested more earnestly against the attempt to submerge the facts of the gospel story under the speculations of philosophy; and yet he insists that, unless demoniacal possession be a reality, Christ was so seriously misled that he could not be even the perfect Prophet. (See his editorial comment on Romanes' note referred to above, and also his *Dissertations*, p. 25.) But surely a theory of the Incarnation which allows us to believe—as Bishop Gore himself believes—that Jesus, though divine, yet thought as did others concerning the authorship of a psalm, cannot deny us the kindred right of supposing that, in the matter of demoniacal possession, He also accepted the limitations of human ignorance.

IV

On the whole subject, therefore, the conclusions most consonant with the facts of modern knowledge and of Scripture seem to be these : that demoniacs of the New Testament were really cases of epilepsy, lunacy, or other nervous disorder ; that the writers of the New Testament, in speaking of them, naturally diagnosed their sufferings according to the common conceptions of their time ; that Jesus Himself, too, shared this common belief, not in mere seeming, as one who would graciously accommodate Himself to our ignorance, but in very deed and truth, because in this, as in all other things, it had pleased Him to be made like unto His brethren.

I think I understand the shrinking with which some will regard this last conclusion ; it will seem to them an infringement of the divine prerogatives with which, in our eyes, Christ is for ever clothed. I can only plead, in reply, that I have striven throughout to be true to the facts, the revealed facts, of our Lord's earthly life. My reading of the facts may very well be mistaken ; if it be, it can be corrected ; but the correction must be found in Scripture itself, not in the supposed interests of any theological theory. Let us learn to beware of an "irreligious solicitude" for God, of being wise above what is written, of claiming for Christ what Scripture does not claim for Him, what He nowhere claims for Himself.



III

THE MISSIONARY IDEA IN THE GOSPELS

III

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FROM two different quarters the call comes to us to-day for a re-examination of the charter of missionary enterprise. On the one hand, the revival of missionary interest and effort, which received such unexampled expression in the Edinburgh Conference, is leading men to investigate anew the whole ground of the missionary appeal. On the other hand, modern New Testament criticism, in its attempt to get behind the reporters of Jesus to Jesus Himself, sometimes questions our right to use—or at least to use in the old way—some of the texts which have long done duty in the missionary cause. The moment, therefore, seems opportune for considering afresh the nature and strength of the missionary argument as it is to be found in the Gospels. When we send our missionaries to press the Christian faith on the peoples of other lands, is our action in line with Christ's own purpose? Can the appeal to the

Churches at home plead His sovereign sanction and authority ? St. Paul, we know, was a missionary ; his eager spirit broke the bonds of Jewish exclusiveness and drove him forth on the world's highways to make known unto all men the gospel of the grace of God ; but Jesus lived and died within the narrow limits of the Holy Land. Then is it to Paul rather than to Jesus that we must look as the founder of missions ? Here, shall we say, is another example of the way in which the strong and masterful personality of the Apostle has dominated the whole Christian Church ; or, may we see behind St. Paul the figure of Another who said once, and who says still, to all who believe in Him, *Go ye into all the world* ? Such is our question. In seeking to answer it I shall, for well-understood reasons, limit myself mainly to the first three Gospels.

I

And at once it has to be admitted that our missionary " texts " are neither so numerous nor so conclusive as perhaps we have been led to expect. There is, of course, the Great Commission given by our Lord to His disciples after His resurrection, and reported in varying forms in our first three

Gospels and in the first chapter of the Acts of the Apostles.¹ But when we turn back to the records of Christ's life and teaching during the years of His public ministry, we are surprised, and perhaps disappointed, to find that there is so little that we can set beside it. There are, it is true, not a few sayings and parables that foreshadow the universal mission of Christianity. Thus, for example, Jesus spoke of His disciples as *the light of the world*, and *the salt of the earth*.² He said that He would build His Church and that the gates of Hades should not prevail against it.³ When a woman anointed Him in the house of Simon at Bethany, He declared that that which she had done should be spoken of for a memorial of her *wheresoever the gospel should be preached throughout the whole world*.⁴ Still more explicit was His word that, before *the end* came, *the gospel must first be preached unto all the nations*.⁵ And once, when His soul was suddenly and deeply moved by the faith of a centurion, there appeared before Him a vision of multitudes coming from the east and the west to sit down with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven.⁶ Of similar

¹ Matt. xxviii. 19, 20, Mark xvi. 15, Luke xxiv. 47 *seq.*, Acts i. 8.

³ Matt. xvi. 18.

⁴ Mark xiv. 9.

² Matt. v. 13, 14.

⁵ Mark xiii. 10.

⁶ Matt. viii. 10.

significance are the parables of the mustard-seed and the leaven,¹ the seed springing in secret,² and of the wicked husbandmen—the latter with its word of solemn warning to the Jews : *Therefore say I unto you, The kingdom of God shall be taken away from you, and shall be given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof.*³ But outside the Great Commission we search the story of Christ's life in vain for any such explicit or repeated injunctions on the subject of world-evangelization as may be found, for example, concerning the use of wealth, or the duty and practice of prayer. Nor is this all. Even the sayings which have just been quoted, including the Great Commission itself, cannot be received at their face value until we have made our reckoning with at least two difficulties which challenge the student of the Gospels to-day.

1. In the first place, there is a small group of Christ's sayings in which He Himself appears to disclaim all thought of a world-wide mission. Thus, when He sent forth the Twelve, He charged them, saying : *Go not into any way of the Gentiles, and enter not into any city of the Samaritans ; but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. . . . Verily I say unto you, Ye shall not have gone*

¹ Matt. xiii. 31-3.

² Mark iv. 26-9.

³ Matt. xxi. 33-43.

*through the cities of Israel till the Son of Man be come.*¹ Again, when the Syro-Phoenician woman besought Him that He would cast forth the devil out of her daughter, He answered and said, *I was not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel. . . . It is not meet to take the children's bread and cast it to the dogs.*² Furthermore, it is undeniable, however we may explain these sayings, that they indicate with rough accuracy the limits—the self-imposed limits—of Christ's own ministry. He Himself went not into any way of the Gentiles. His intercourse with them was rare and casual. Other sheep He had which were not of the Jewish fold, but the shepherding of them He left to other hands.

These things the Gospels tell us; and we can well believe that it was to facts and sayings such as these that the Jewish Christians would make their appeal in their opposition to the larger gospel of St. Paul. The same appeal is sometimes made to-day by those who look upon missions rather as an after-thought of the disciples than a part of the original purpose of Jesus. Harnack, for example, concludes, especially from the saying concerning the coming of the Son of Man, that “the Gentile mission cannot have lain within the horizon of

¹ Matt. x. 5, 6, 23.

² Matt. xv. 24 *seq.*; cf. Mark vii, 27.

Jesus.”¹ Do the facts warrant the conclusion? The single saying emphasized by Harnack undoubtedly presents serious difficulties of its own which it is impossible just now to discuss; but it is surely unnecessary, in order to give a reasonable explanation of the restrictions which Jesus laid upon the Twelve, and which He observed Himself, to say that the universal mission of Christ lay beyond the scope of His thought and purpose.

For consider: do not the very restrictions imply and reveal a consciousness on some one's part that the gospel which the Twelve were sent to preach was fitted for a wider world than Judaism? Why should Jesus say, *Go not into any way of the Gentiles; enter not into any city of the Samaritans*, unless already to His mind or to theirs the thought were present: this is a message not for the Jew only, but for all men? But the disciples, we are sure, as yet, had no such thought. What Jew of Palestine in Christ's day would have planned a mission to Gentile dogs or half-heathen Samaritans? It is Christ's own thought which His words reveal. Moreover, is not the fact just named itself a sufficient explanation of the restricted commission? The Twelve as yet were manifestly disqualified for missionary labour in the region

¹ *Expansion of Christianity*, p. 41 (footnote).

beyond. How could they, with their closely clinging prejudices, be made the bearers of glad tidings to Samaritans and Gentiles whom they hated and despised? They were ready to call down fire from heaven upon them; they were wholly unready to preach to them the gospel of the kingdom of God. And, still further, is it not reasonable to suppose that the limitations which at this stage Christ both imposed and observed were only prudential and temporary and with a view to the wider development which history was soon to reveal? "Give me a fulcrum for my lever," said the old Greek mathematician, "and I will move the world." And it was in Judaism that Jesus sought the fulcrum for the lever of His gospel. Or, to change the figure, just as a military commander, bent on the conquest of a great territory, will resolutely restrict himself, in the earlier stages of his campaign, to the securing of a safe and strong base of operations, and will do this just because it is the conquest of the whole country that he is planning, so in the beginning did Jesus limit Himself to one small land, only that in the end His disciples might win their way to the uttermost parts of the earth.

2. Our second difficulty is of a more serious and embarrassing character, and cannot be disposed of so readily. It arises from the application to our

Gospels of modern methods of critical inquiry. Let it be said at once that it is as vain as it is mistaken to imagine that we can rail off the New Testament literature and turn back the critic with a "warning to trespassers." In all our records of the past there is what is called "the contemporary equation." "Each document contains a standpoint as well as a subject."¹ The white light of truth reaches us tinged by the human medium through which it has passed. And the equation, the standpoint, the colour due to the medium, have all to be taken into account. This is the task of criticism. Before the historical student can use his sources he must test them, patiently and without prejudice. And from this preliminary testing our sources, the Christian Scriptures, cannot hope to escape. Nor ought we to wish that they could. From criticism which is without bias, and which takes all the facts into account, we have nothing to fear, we have much to hope. And if, as not unfrequently happens, the critic does not know how to be fair—if he is ridden by theories of what he thinks "must be" or "cannot be," if he seeks to rewrite the facts rather than to interpret them, above all, if he is blind and deaf to the realities of the spiritual world—then the remedy lies, not in the rejection of the critical method, but

¹ J. Moffatt's *Historical New Testament*, p. 9.

in seeking to give to it a juster and more self-consistent application.

How, then, does it fare at the hands of criticism with those sayings in the Gospels which we have been wont to use as our missionary texts ? Let us take, first, the little group of sayings which were brought together at the beginning of this lecture, and in which is foreshadowed the universal mission of Christianity, and let us see how these are dealt with by a modern New Testament scholar like Harnack. In his work, *The Expansion of Christianity*, there is a chapter entitled, "Jesus Christ and the Universal Mission according to the Gospels." It opens with this statement : " We cannot but admit that Mark and Matthew have consistently withstood the temptation to introduce the Gentile mission into the words and deeds of Jesus." But Harnack only reaches this result by a very liberal, and, as many of his readers will feel, a very arbitrary use of the critical pitchfork. Thus, for example, the sayings in the Sermon on the Mount—*ye are the light of the world, ye are the salt of the earth*—and the words, *for all the nations*, in Mark xi. 17, we are told " we may disregard " ; but in neither case are we told why. Similarly, in Christ's words to the Syro-Phœnician woman, *Let the children first be filled*, the " first," we read, " is not to be pressed." True ; but neither is it to be suppressed.

The warning in the parable of the husbandmen—*The kingdom of God shall be given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof*—refers not to the Gentiles, but to the “nation,” as opposed to the official Israel; the statement that, before the end comes *the gospel must first be preached unto all nations* is “a historical theologoumenon,” put into the lips of Jesus, “which hardly came from Him in its present form”; the saying that sprang out of the anointing at Bethany—*wheresoever the gospel shall be preached throughout the whole world*, etc.—“simply represents a remark which readily acquired a heightened colour from the fact of the subsequent mission to the world.” After this it can hardly surprise us to be told that Mark “was determined to keep the Gentile mission apart from the gospel”; that Matthew “consistently retains the setting of the latter within the Jewish nation,” and that Luke’s standpoint “does not differ from that of the two previous evangelists.”¹

Let us turn now to the more crucial question of the Great Commission. And here, again, we are met by the doubts or denials of criticism. Harnack is quite sure that Jesus never issued such a command as is contained in the closing

¹ The quotations are all from chap. iv. of Harnack’s work. I am indebted for some pointed criticism of Harnack’s position to two articles in *The Expository Times* (October and November 1907), by Dr. Weitbrecht.

verses of Matthew's Gospel, "but that this reading of His life was due to the historical developments of a later age." ¹ In similar fashion Dr. James Moffatt, in his *Historical New Testament*, attributes the words, not to Jesus, but to "the later spirit of the Church." ² Dr. A. B. Bruce, too, though he believes that a universal mission had its place in the mind of Christ, yet nevertheless inclines to the opinion that the words in Matthew's Gospel are not so much "a report of what the risen Jesus said to His disciples at a given time and place, as rather a summary of what the Apostolic Church understood to be the will of the exalted Lord." ³

What, now, shall we say to all this? Obviously we cannot claim for Matthew that he has preserved for us the *ipsissima verba* of our Lord. Apart from the fact that this particular saying, like many of the sayings of Jesus, may in its form owe something to the prepossessions of His reporters, Matthew's account of the Commission differs from Mark's, and Luke's from both, so that any claim to verbal exactness is manifestly out of the question. What, however, we may and must maintain is that behind these varying forms lies the substance of the Great Commission. Dr. Denney puts the

¹ Harnack, p. 45.

² Page 648.

³ *Apologetics*, p. 463. See also *Expositor's Greek Testament*, vol. i, p. 340,

case with his usual moderation and lucidity when he says : “ How much the form of it may owe to the conditions of transmission, repetition, condensation, and even interpolation, we may not be able precisely to say, since these conditions must have varied indefinitely, and in ways we cannot calculate ; but the *fact* of a great charge, the general import of which was thoroughly understood, seems indisputable. All the Gospels give it in one form or another ; and even if we concede that the language in which it is expressed owes something to the Church’s consciousness of what it had come to possess through its risen Lord, this does not affect in the least the fact that every known form of the evangelic tradition puts such a charge, or instruction, or commission, into the lips of Jesus after His Resurrection.” ¹ Of course, if any one has made up his mind beforehand that Jesus could not and did not appear to His disciples after His death in the way our Gospels represent—and it is not unfair to say that a good deal of contemporary criticism goes to work on this assumption—it will be incumbent upon him to get rid, in some way or other, of all the post-resurrection sayings which they put into Christ’s lips. But no such presuppositions, whatever may be the intellectual necessities of those who make them, are

¹ *Death of Christ*, p. 68.

any evidence against the genuineness of the evangelic tradition. "Granting," as Dr. Denney says, "that the Resurrection was, what our only authorities report it to be, the manifestation of Jesus in another mode of being in which it was possible for Him, at least for a time, and when He would, to have communication with His own—granting this, there is no reason why He should not have said such things to them as the Gospels tell us He did say." ¹

And when we turn the page, when, *i.e.*, we pass from the Gospels to the Acts, we find in the subsequent and almost immediate history of the Church every reason why He should have said such things. "After the disciples were convinced that Jesus was no longer dead," writes Harnack, "they at once started to preach Him and His gospel with the utmost ardour. This was inevitable in the nature of things." ² Well, whatever we may think about "the nature of things," to no one who shares the New Testament feeling for Christ and His gospel will either the ardour or the inevitableness of the disciples' preaching present any difficulty. But surely the most reasonable and adequate explanation of the abounding missionary activity, of which the book of Acts is the record,

¹ *Death of Christ*, p. 69.

² *Expansion of Christianity*, vol. i, p. 49.

is that behind it all lies the definite authority of Christ Himself. I do not mean that the history proves the reality of such a Commission as Matthew records, nor that without it the history would be inexplicable, but that the history is of such a kind as to lend additional credibility to the Gospel record. There is a further point to be kept in mind. Racially and religiously, the Jews are the most persistently exclusive people the world has ever known. And when we remember that at first, as we have seen, that exclusiveness was sanctioned by Christ Himself, does it not become morally certain that nothing less than the strong impact of Christ's own command could have pushed the disciples out of the shallows of Judaism into the great deep of the world's life? In face of the opposition which met it on every side, how could the missionary idea have gained and kept its feet unless it had been able to plead some sure, clear word of His?

It has, indeed, been suggested that early Christianity owed something of its missionary enthusiasm to the legacy which it took over from contemporary Judaism. That there was an active Jewish propaganda during the period immediately preceding the dawn of Christianity is probably true. In no other way does it seem possible to account for the enormous number of Jews who were scattered

throughout the Roman Empire at the beginning of the Christian era, and whose presence is one of the proofs of that preparation in history for Christ concerning which so much has been written. It may be an echo of that fervent time which has reached us in our Lord's reference to those who compassed sea and land to make one proselyte. But whatever may have been the character or the results of this movement—and we really know very little about it—it is impossible to recognize in it the true forerunner of the Gentile mission. When we remember what has been the history of the Jews, both ancient and modern ; when we think of Pharisaism scornfully picking its way through a world of publicans and sinners ; when we listen to the shout of execration which greeted St. Paul on the streets of Jerusalem at the mere mention of the Gentile name—*Away with such a fellow from the earth : for it is not fit that he should live*¹ ; and when we remember that still, in this day of missionary societies, the Jew has none, that indeed hardly anything is more unthinkable than that the wealthy Jews of London and New York should unite for the conversion of China and Japan to the Hebrew faith—when, I say, we remember these things, it is vain to seek in Judaism for the headwaters of that great stream of missionary activity

¹ Acts xxii. 22.

which flows in an ever-widening and deepening channel through all the centuries of Christian history.

Hardly less mistaken are those who speak as if the real author of missions were St. Paul. The Church universal is too deeply in the great Apostle's debt to be in any real danger of forgetting him or belittling his work. But when it is suggested that Christianity is mainly the creation of his eager brain and fervent heart, the ordinary reader of the New Testament may be forgiven if he declines to treat the suggestion seriously. He knows too well how St. Paul thought of himself, and of his relation to Christ, ever to be under the temptation to set him in the seat of his Master. How, he asks himself, would the Apostle have answered those who sought to do him this strange dishonour? No, St. Paul was an apostle, even as the rest, *by the will of Christ*.

This, then, is the conclusion to which our brief discussion has led us: the source of Christian missions is to be found, not in St. Paul, still less in the activities of contemporary Judaism, but in the declared will and purpose of Christ Himself. True, the sayings in which these find expression are comparatively few, and even these few may not have reached us in the precise form in which they fell from our Lord's lips. There is, nevertheless,

good reason for the belief, which the Church has always held, that it was from Christ Himself that she received the charge to make disciples of all the nations.

II

I can well believe that some may have listened thus far with a chilling sense of disappointment. "What!" they will ask, "is this all? A meagre handful of texts snatched from the strife of contending schools—is this all that the Gospels can contribute to the sacred cause of missions? How can we fight the missionary battle with weapons of no tougher steel than these? How can we kindle the missionary fire with only this scanty heap of fuel?" So not unnaturally the question may be asked. And certain it is, doubtful disputations about texts, inevitable as they may be, carry us but a very little way on our road. It is not in an atmosphere of debate, where argument must be weighed against argument, and the balance of probability struck, that the great constraints are felt which make the missionary. But the truth is, the New Testament argument for missions is a far bigger thing than many of us have ever realized. We have so pinned our faith to a few over-worked texts that if some one threaten to take these from

us it seems as if the whole case for missions had gone up in smoke. There is, indeed, good reason, as I have been trying to show, why we should still hold fast to our texts. But do not let us speak as if these were our sole, or even our main, missionary warrant. For my part, I cannot pretend to be sorry, rather I rejoice, that our modern methods of Biblical study are compelling us—and that not merely in the matter of missions—no longer to put our trust in texts, but to seek our knowledge of the divine purpose over the broad spaces and larger areas of divine revelation. For the moment we abandon our old microscopic methods of Bible study, or, let me rather say, when we supplement them by the study of the Bible as a whole we begin to see that our so-called proof-texts are scarcely so much as the fringe of the great missionary argument. As Dr. Horton says, “It is not that here and there are missionary texts, injunctions, or suggestions, and that a careful student might painfully extract from certain proof-texts a defence of missionary effort; but it is that the whole book is a clear, ringing, and everlasting missionary injunction.”¹ So that even if—though I do not think it at all likely—Harnack and his friends should turn out to be right, and we should have to surrender the few verses in which Jesus

¹ *The Bible a Missionary Book*, p. 181.

anticipates the world-wide preaching of His gospel ; nay, even if we were driven to admit that the Great Commission itself is rather the reflection of the mind of the Church than the direct command of Christ, the missionary application would still press with unweakened force on all who bear the Christian name. This is the point which it will be the aim of the second part of this paper to make good. We are committed to the missionary enterprise by the very nature of the truth we possess. Because Christianity is what it is, because Christ is what He is, we cannot keep Him or it to ourselves alone. In this sense Harnack is right ; it was “ in the nature of things ” that the disciples of Christ should preach Him and His gospel with the utmost ardour. Even if Jesus never in so many words uttered the Great Commission, it is implied in all He said and did and was. Call it, if you will, the Church’s inference rather than the Lord’s command, yet it is an inference which only disloyalty could fail to draw ; for the very make of the gospel declares that it is as much for everybody as it is for anybody.

Thanks to recent Biblical scholarship, we are now able to see in the very *language* of the New Testament a symbol of the universality of its message. As late as but yesterday our scholars have been in the habit of treating the Greek of

the New Testament as essentially a language by itself. Every one knew, of course, that it differed widely from the Greek of the older classical period, whether Doric, Æolic, Ionic, or Attic. It was equally clear that it could not be identified with the literary Greek which was in common use throughout the Roman Empire at the beginning of the Christian era, and in which all the early dialects had been merged. There seemed no escape from the conclusion, therefore, which also fitted in readily with certain dogmatic prepossessions, that the language of the New Testament formed a class by itself; it was “the language of the Holy Ghost,” unprofaned by common use, and to be distinguished from all other Greek, as “Biblical” or “New Testament” Greek. Within the last few years, however—since the publication of the Revised Version of the New Testament—two facts have been brought to light by the industry and genius of scholars which have entirely changed the whole situation. In the first place, mainly through the unearthing and deciphering of a vast mass of papyri—“wills, official reports, private letters, petitions, accounts, and other trivial survivals”—discovered in the rubbish-heaps of ancient Egypt, we have been permitted to see for the first time the popular colloquial form of the Greek of our Lord’s day. As in the literature of the period

we learn what the language had become in the hands of the cultured and literary classes, so here, in the buried papyri, we have it fresh from the lips of the common people, in the ordinary intercourse of daily life. And now comes the surprising and illuminating discovery, due in large measure to the brilliant labours of A. Deissmann and J. H. Moulton—and this is the second fact to which I refer—that it is in this same vernacular of daily life that our New Testament itself is written. Hundreds of words, hitherto assumed to be purely Biblical, the half-technical terms of the new religion, minted afresh, if not actually coined, to serve its purpose, are now seen to be in reality “normal first century spoken Greek.” We can assert with assurance, says Dr. Moulton, that “the papyri have finally destroyed the figment of a New Testament Greek which in any material respect differs from that spoken by ordinary people in daily life throughout the Roman world.” In a word, there is no such thing as “Biblical” Greek. “The language of the Holy Ghost” is the language of common life. The New Testament is the book of the people, written in the language of the people, and to the people everywhere we must give it, or the very dictionary and grammar will cry out against us.¹

¹ See J. H. Moulton's *Grammar of New Testament Greek*, ch. i.

All this is very interesting, and, as a symbol of the universality of the gospel, it is full of suggestion. But we shall need to go much deeper than language if we are to discover in the gospel itself the missionary warrant of which we are in quest. Let us glance for a moment, then, first at the teaching of Christ, and then at Christ Himself.

1. And at once we are confronted with a conception of Christ's teaching and its significance which, if it be accepted, will make short work of our whole argument. According to a certain school of recent New Testament interpreters, the central determining idea of Christ's whole life and ministry was eschatology. In other words, Christ taught that God's kingdom was coming, that it was coming soon, that the Son of Man Himself was about to appear in the clouds of heaven and usher in the eternal reign of righteousness. Such, it is said, was Christ's expectation, and His ethical teaching must be construed in the light of it. If the end of all things were at hand, obviously man's great concern was to make ready for it; he must sit loose to all human joys and prepare himself for the impending change. Hence, we are told, the morality of the gospel is not final and absolute, a morality for all men, under all circumstances. It is rather of the nature of what the Germans call "interim ethics"—a morality suited to the

attitude of those who are awaiting a great and immediate crisis. Christ's teaching concerning His Second Coming cannot, of course, be discussed now ; it presents, as every one knows, one of the thorniest problems in the whole field of New Testament interpretation ; but this at least may be said : whatever Jesus may have believed about the future, it is too late in the day to suggest that His moral teaching is only of the nature of a temporary expedient to tide over a brief time of waiting before the end. For centuries the best and wisest men in the civilized world have gone to that teaching for their loftiest ideals of duty ; they have found in it the sanction and inspiration of their noblest efforts ; and it really will not do now for some one to come forward and tell us that, after all, we have been deceiving ourselves, and that the morality of the Gospels is simply a string of temporary precepts which owe their origin to a mistaken idea of Jesus. Whatever men may think about Christ, they know that in Him they have found the nearest approach to the Absolute in morals that this world has to offer.

And it is this quality of absoluteness, this timeless, eternal element in Christ's teaching, which constitutes for all who receive it the obligation to make it known. If its value were relative only, if it were of worth to one, but not to another, if

it could appeal to the West, but were powerless to touch the East, the case would be different ; but since Christ's words have proved themselves " the living contemporaries of every age," every age has a right to them ; because they are suited to all, they belong to all, and to withhold them from any is to withhold from them a part of their natural human birthright. Take, for example, Christ's teaching concerning the Divine Fatherhood. If that is true at all, it is universally true, and therefore it ought to be universally made known. The missionary obligation does not depend on whether or not there is attached to the truth an explicit word of command, *Go, tell it to all men* ; it is inherent in the truth itself, and wherever it is worthily realized it creates its own missionaries :

I say to thee, do thou repeat
To the first man thou mayest meet
In lane, highway, or open street—

That he and we and all men move
Under a canopy of love
As broad as the blue sky above.

That is the natural logic of the matter, and I cannot get past so much as the first word of the Lord's Prayer without being reminded of it : *When ye pray, say, not Father simply, still less my Father, but our Father.* The fraternal consciousness

is bound up with, it is a part of, the filial consciousness, and he only has entered into the spirit of sonship who is eager to share with all his brethren the gifts of the Father's love.

But there is no time to speak of particular doctrines ; let me emphasize again the timeless element in Christ's teaching. It is identified with none of those things which in their very nature grow old and pass with the passing years : " It has no laboured law or exacting code, no stereotyped system or ecclesiastical institutions, no ceremonial, or priest, or temple." ¹ Christ's precepts are not provincial edicts, but imperial laws meant to govern the whole world of moral agency. His words of grace are as universal as the sunshine and the air. *Heaven and earth shall pass away*, He said, *but My words shall not pass away*. It was an astounding thing to say ; if it were not that long familiarity has dulled our minds to the wonder of it, its boldness would take our breath away ; but, what is still more astonishing, the saying has come true—Christ's words have not passed away, nor can we conceive that they ever will. When will the Lord's Prayer be out of date ? Different Churches have their different forms of prayer, and once in a while they pass under the hand of the reviser. Even in the Psalter there are things that make us wince

¹ *The Bible a Missionary Book*, p. 62.

sometimes when we hear them in church. But no individual Church can claim the Lord's Prayer ; it belongs to us all, and he would be a bold man indeed who should propose to lay revising hands on it. Can we so much as imagine a time when men will not need, or will not wish to hear, the beatitudes of the Mount or the Parable of the Good Samaritan ? It is not simply that Christ was, as we say, " in advance of His time " ; many great teachers have been that, and yet, in the end, they have been left behind, and their words forgotten ; rather it is that with Him the question of time hardly enters into the reckoning at all—" You cannot date the mind of Christ "—and it is this quality of timelessness which, by detaching His teaching from any particular age, has made it the possession of all the ages. And, again I say, all this involves the missionary idea. It is sheer perversity that can find the missionary " marching orders " only in a single verse of St. Matthew's Gospel ; they are writ large on every page of the New Testament. If we have, we owe ; we owe because we have ; we owe to every man who has not. Discipleship to such a faith commits us to apostleship.

2. From the teaching of Christ let us turn to Christ Himself. And, again, we note the universal and eternal in what He was no less than in what

He taught. The local and the temporary are there, as indeed they must be, since Christ was born of a Jewish mother. But these things are not He, nor do they explain Him. We may know everything about the Jews and Palestine nineteen hundred years ago, and yet we may be hardly one step nearer understanding Him. The methods of the modern literary realist are not without their value, but not to them does the secret of Jesus reveal itself. This is what some of us in our study of the background of the sacred story are forgetting. Little by little the artist and the traveller, the historian and the scholar, are reconstructing for us the life of that far-off day, until we seem to know Jesus—the dress He wore, the language He spoke, the tools He used, the home He dwelt in—as we know a man of our own city. The landscape of Palestine, its hills and rivers, its towns and villages, its flowers and trees, are as familiar to us as those of our native land. And all this, of course, has its uses, but it has also its perils: we may lose the universal in the local, the Son of God in the Syrian prophet, the Lord of glory in the Man of Nazareth. “Local colouring” is not to be despised, but unless besides we get the far vistas and wide horizons of the Gospels, we have not seen the true Jesus. He is no mere son of Abraham, He is the Son of Man, the universal Man.

Mark the perfect symmetry of His character. We pick out the characteristics of other men ; who can name the characteristics of Jesus ? All types of excellence meet in Him. We speak of the manliness of Christ ; we are equally true to the facts if we speak of His womanliness. He is as strong as He is gentle ; as brave as He is tender. The active and the contemplative may each find in Him their ideal. “ Lay emphasis on either side, and there is something in the Gospels to which you do injustice.” ¹

Mark the completeness of His sympathies. General Booth, it is said, in the earlier days of “ The Army ” confessed that he was forced to make a choice ; no man’s arms are long enough, he said, to reach out to give a hand to the rich and to the people of the depths. Probably he was right ; but Christ is confined to no class, and is cut off from none. Some one has remarked that Shakespeare, with all his myriad-mindedness, never seems to have entered into the mind of a little child ; there are no real children in his plays, only grown-up men and women trying to talk like children. But who ever opened the Gospel page only to turn away with the feeling : “ This man does not understand me ; my life lies beyond the reach of His sympathy ” ?

¹ See Johnston Ross’s *Universality of Jesus*, p. 32.

He took the suffering human race,
He read each wound, each weakness clear,
And struck His finger on the place,
And said, *Thou ailest here and here.*

We of the English-speaking world sometimes speak of Christ as if He belonged, if not to the Anglo-Saxon people, at least to the Western world. But He belongs to none save as He belongs to all; He is of the race, "the one true cosmopolitan"; and when the East sees Him as we see Him, the East will claim Him for its own as justly as we claim Him ours. The East will not want our theology; but that is a small matter. When it has seen Christ it may be trusted to make its own.

East is East, and West is West; and never the twain shall meet—

so in the street we hear men say,

"But Christ is Christ, and rest is rest,
And love true love must greet.
In East and West hearts crave for rest;
And so the twain *shall* meet.
—The East still East, the West still West—
At Love's nail-piercèd feet."

In all that has been urged in this chapter concerning the universality of Christ and His teaching the appeal throughout has been to the Gospel records. But let it not be forgotten that this claim comes to us to-day interpreted and illuminated by the confirmation of the centuries. This

is no untested theory that we are putting forward. The claim we make for Christ, stupendous as it is, has been vindicated in the world's great judgment hall. "The Christian religion, born in Judea, formulated in Greece, organized in Rome, propagated by Teuton and Frank," is yet "neither Jewish, Greek, Roman, nor Saxon"; it has "acclimatized itself in all lands." Is there anything in human history which suggests even a faint comparison with the simple tale of facts furnished by the great British and Foreign Bible Society? "Take any book ever written, the very flower of literature and the supremest effort of human thought, translate it into four hundred and twelve languages, from Sanskrit down to the rudest jargon of savages, and scatter it broadcast over the world. When that is done, and the books have sold everywhere and brought civilization and humanity wherever they have gone,"¹ then, but not till then, you will have a parallel to what has been wrought by the four tiny tracts which tell the story of the life of Christ.

What an impulse lies in all this for our modern missionary effort! Contrast our position to-day with that of the disciples at the beginning of the Christian era. They were as hardy pioneers voyaging through strange seas alone. They knew,

¹ J. H. Moulton, *Hibbert Journal*, ch. vii., p. 765.

indeed, what Christ had been and was to them, but in a sense theirs was a solitary faith, they were making an untried experiment, and when their hearts failed them through fear, there was no long history—that best cordial for drooping spirits—to tell them they were right. We envy them sometimes their nearness to the earthly life of Jesus, but had such a thing been possible, might they not rather have envied us our deep sense of comradeship with the past, our knowledge of what Christianity has proved itself to be over the broad fields of the world's life? We have, as they had, the will of Christ explicit in one great charge, implicit in all He said and did; we have also, what they could not have, the confirmation of the centuries. It is no doubtful venture on which we are bidden to embark. Not Scripture only, but Scripture interpreted and made luminous by history, calls us to the missionary task. On our bowed heads an awful past has laid its consecrating hands.

To doubt would be disloyalty,
To falter would be sin.

IV
THE ETHICAL BACKGROUND OF ST.
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It is always essential, for a just interpretation of the ethical teaching of St. Paul's Epistles, to keep steadily in view the actual conditions of the world in which the Apostle lived and worked. No man was ever less of a doctrinaire than St. Paul. He writes always with his eye upon the object. His ethical judgments imply, and must be interpreted in relation to, an actually existing background in life. The vices which he brands are the vices of which he himself had been an eye-witness—at Ephesus, at Corinth, at Rome. The virtues which he specially enjoins reveal none the less clearly the moral necessities of the hour because they are likewise of universal obligation. Like a wise preacher, St. Paul fashions his message to the needs of those to whom it is immediately addressed ; the wider applications of which it is capable never lead him to forget the problem lying at his feet. It is this close and continual contact with the moral

realities of life around him which gives to the writings of St. Paul the interest which they must always possess for the student whose eyes are turned to the first century of the Christian era.

Here is yet another reading of the significance of one of the most perplexing and yet fascinating periods in the history of mankind. The world which lies behind this handful of letters, and of which they give us fleeting glimpses, is the same world whose stir and movement fill the pages of Tacitus and Suetonius, of Seneca and Epictetus, of Juvenal and Martial. It becomes, therefore, a matter of interest, alike to the student of Scripture and of history, to inquire how far the judgment of the Apostle is confirmed, or corrected, or contradicted, by the many other witnesses—historians, philosophers, satirists—whose evidence is before us. Is St. Paul's reading of the moral situation justified by the facts? This is the question which I propose in this paper briefly to consider.

I

The impression left on the mind by a first reading of the relevant sections of St. Paul's Epistles is undoubtedly one of extreme severity. To *walk as the Gentiles walk* is with St. Paul almost a synonym for unnamable wickedness.¹ Those long catalogues

¹ See Eph. iv. 17. Cp. 1 Thess. iv. 5; 1 Pet. iv. 3.

of vice which meet us so often in his Epistles,¹ and which, be it remembered, we owe not to the art of the rhetorician, but to the searching minuteness of the moral observer, reveal the ugly exuberance of evil which met the Apostle's eyes everywhere as he journeyed through the cities of the Roman Empire. The same pitiless particularity, the same unsparing condemnation, are found again in the first chapter of the Epistle to the Romans, and in a briefer though not less emphatic passage in the Epistle to the Ephesians.² But, indeed, reference to individual "texts" is hardly necessary: the moral failure of the world is one of the great presuppositions of the Pauline Gospel; it is because man is so far gone that God must intervene; it is because he can do nothing for himself that God must do everything for him. This is the bottom fact which underlies all St. Paul's teaching concerning the way of salvation: the utter and final breakdown of man's every effort, whether of Jew or Gentile, to work out his own righteousness and fulfil the destiny for which he was created.

Such was St. Paul's judgment on the world of his day, and it wears, as I have said, a look of unmistakable severity. Two facts, however, need to be kept in mind. In the first place, as has been

¹ See, *e.g.*, Rom. i. 28-32; Gal. v. 19-21; Col. iii. 5.

² Ch. iv. 17-19.

pointed out, "The standard which St. Paul applies is not that of the historian, but of the preacher. He does not judge by the average level of moral attainment at different epochs, but by the ideal standard of that which ought to be attained."¹ And, secondly, although in the passages referred to above the Apostle's condemnation stands without limitation or qualification of any kind, yet elsewhere he has himself suggested that the facts there in view are not the whole of the facts. When, *e.g.*, he says that *when Gentiles which have no law do by nature the things of the law, these, having no law, are a law unto themselves ; in that they show the work of the law written in their hearts*² ; and when, again, in the same chapter he remonstrates with the Jew who prides himself on his circumcision, saying, *Shall not the uncircumcision which is by nature, if it fulfil the law, judge thee, who, with the letter and circumcision, art a transgressor of the law?*³ he plainly assumes alike some knowledge and performance of moral duty on the part of heathen men. Nevertheless, seek as we may to soften the Apostle's judgment, the general impression of severity remains. Is it vindicated by the findings of history ?

¹ Sanday and Headlam's *Romans*, p. 51.

² Rom. ii. 14, 15.

³ Rom. ii. 25-7.

II

The question does not now, perhaps, admit of so confident an answer as was at one time thought possible. So many fresh facts bearing upon the social, political, and moral life of the Roman Empire are continually being brought to light, and such immense blanks in our knowledge still remain which no further investigation is ever likely to fill up, that we wisely hesitate to commit ourselves to those sweeping generalizations which are the easy refuge of the half-informed. Of life in Rome itself during the first century of our era we have ample opportunity of judging. Historian, philosopher, and satirist have set the gay and wicked city in so fierce a light that, even at this far-off day, we are able to thread its narrow streets, to examine its public buildings, to watch from the crowded benches of the vast amphitheatre its cruel sports, and to enter the homes of its private citizens. "We know very well," says Boissier, "how time was passed at Rome, ancient authors being full of precise information on the subject. In Cicero's letters we can live the day of a statesman over again. Horace's satires paint for us to the very life the existence of a loungeur whose chief occupations were to walk in the Forum or along the Sacred Way, to look at the ball-players in the

Field of Mars, to chat with the corn or vegetable merchants, and in the evening to listen to the quacks and the fortune-tellers. Juvenal, more indiscreet, allows us a peep into the interior of a dreadful tavern, the trysting-place of sailors, robbers, and fugitive slaves, at the end of which the officials of the funereal pomps sleep side by side with the begging priests of the Great Goddess.”¹ But this is just one of those instances in which the old rule *ex pede Herculem* does not apply. Because we know the life of Rome we have no right to conclude that we know the life of the Roman Empire. Were an English author to base a history of French social life and manners simply upon what he had learned in Paris, or were a French author who knew nothing of England except what he had learned in London to write a similar work about ourselves, their conclusions would obviously be wide of the mark ; nor have we any reason to expect that the same methods applied to the study of Roman life would yield more trustworthy results. Now, unfortunately, abundant as are our authorities for the study of life in Rome itself, they almost wholly fail us when we turn from the capital to the provinces. Modern novelists have depicted with almost wearisome iteration the dissolute splendour of Nero’s city and court, but who among them has

¹ *Rome and Pompeii*, p. 359.

found it possible to lift the veil from that larger Roman world which lay beyond the reach of Rome's immediate influence? "The silence of Roman literature generally," says Dr. Dill, "as to social life outside the capital is very remarkable."¹ There is a similar lament in Boissier's pages; but Boissier pronounces the magic word "Pompeii" and declares himself comforted: "The discovery of Pompeii quite consoles us for the silence of the ancient writers. In order to know how people lived outside Rome, we need no longer with great trouble gather trivial and doubtful texts, for a short walk in Pompeii teaches us infinitely more."² But despite the French savant's assurances we must still refuse to be comforted, and we need go no further than his own pages to justify our refusal. "If," he says, after several illustrations of the way in which Rome's influence had penetrated to the most distant corners of the Empire, "if the customs, the fashions, and the manner of speaking and living of the Romans were faithfully reproduced at the ends of the world, it is clear that this imitation

¹ *Roman Society*, etc., p. 196. "With the general state of European morals under the first centuries of the Empire we are extremely ill acquainted. Tacitus and Juvenal describe the society of the capital. Of life in the country and in the provincial towns they tell us next to nothing" (Froude's *Short Studies*, vol. iii, p. 263).

² *Rome and Pompeii*, p. 359.

must have been much more visible in an Italian city, and, above all, at Pompeii—that is to say, at the gates of Baiæ and Naples, whither the elegant youth of Rome went every year ‘to enjoy the warm baths and the enchanting spectacle of the sea.’”¹ Exactly ; and the curious thing is that our author does not appear to realize that it is just because Pompeii was so completely under the spell of Rome that we are unable to treat it as a typical provincial town. Suppose—to go back to the parallel which has already been made use of—that almost all the records of English provincial life in the nineteenth century were to perish while, by some strange chance of fortune, those of Brighton were rescued from the general destruction, with what hope of success would an historian seek, from these slender memorials, to reconstruct the life of an average country town, say, in Yorkshire, Perthshire, or Munster ? Is it a simpler task which confronts the scholar who endeavours from the ruins of one small Italian and semi-Romanized town to build up the provincial life of the far-stretching Roman Empire ?

As we might have expected, the silence of Roman literature is always deepest where the life of the common people is concerned. “We know the rich classes of antiquity pretty well,” says Boissier ; “it is especially of them that history tells us,

¹ *Rome and Pompeii*, p. 363.

acquainting us with their ways and thought of living. On the other hand, neither poets nor historians have busied themselves much with the poor.”¹ Dr. Dill bears the same testimony: “The usual fashion of writing Roman history,” he says, “has concentrated attention on the doings of the emperor, the life of the noble class in the capital, or on the stations of the legions, and the political organization of the provinces. It is a stately and magnificent panorama; but it is apt to throw the life of the masses into even deeper shadow than that in which time has generally enwrapped them.”² But, as Boissier takes comfort from Pompeii, so Dill finds in the novel of Petronius “a brilliant light” amid the darkness in which Roman literature for the most part has been content to leave the mass of men who toil and spin. One should be thankful for any light where the darkness is so dense and our desire to see so keen; but Petronius is an even more uncertain guide than Pompeii. Of his work, the *Satiricon*, only a few fragments remain, the largest of which, *Cena Trimalchionis*, describes a feast given by an ignorant, wealthy upstart, probably in the town of Cumæ in Campania, during the reign of Nero.³

¹ *Rome and Pompeii*, p. 345.

² *Roman Society*, etc., p. 263.

³ Petronius is believed to be the æsthetic voluptuary whose death in A.D. 66 is described by Tacitus, *Annals*, ch. xvi. 18,

Thus we are still within the circle of Rome's immediate influence; the world of Petronius is the old world of Roman luxury and vice which we already know so well; his pages flash another fitful gleam of light across that troubled sea whose waters cast up mire and dirt continually; but it is idle to pretend that he leaves us any the wiser concerning the condition of the common people of the Empire in the days when St. Paul was preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God.

III

Again, if lack of knowledge warns us against hasty generalizations, the knowledge which we do possess equally forbids indiscriminate condemnation. As long as we have regard only to one class of facts—as long, for example, as we fix our eyes on Nero's court, with its senseless luxury, its moral beastliness, its endless ingenuities of vice—language seems inadequate to its loathsome task, and exaggeration impossible. But once more let it be said that, as Piccadilly is not London, so neither was Nero's court Rome. It is probably true, as Dr. Marcus Dods has said, that the world has never been so ingeniously and exhaustively wicked as in Rome during the first

19. See Dill's *Roman Society*, p. 120 *seq.*, and J. B. Bury's *Student's Roman Empire*, p. 465.

century¹; it is no less true that there was another and better side to Roman life which Christian writers sometimes seem to have lost sight of. In Farrar's *Seekers after God*, for example, and again in the opening chapter of his *Early Days of Christianity*, the state of Roman society is depicted in terms of such unrelieved horror and gloom that, if there be nothing more to be said, we feel at once that such a society could not possibly continue to exist; it must perish of its own rottenness. Human virtues are the pins and bolts by which the social fabric is held together; many of them may be withdrawn and yet the fabric stand; when all are gone it falls in ruin. That Roman society stood for so long—Nero had been in his grave more than four hundred years before the final crash came—shows how much that was good and strong there must have been behind the flaunting vices of the imperial court. Nor are evidences of the presence of this better element wanting.

To begin with, there was an immense body of Jews scattered throughout the whole Empire. Their exact number it is impossible now to calculate with certainty, but it must have been very large—"many thousands, nay millions," says Schürer.² In Rome, we are told, they abounded

¹ *Erasmus and other Essays*, p. 278.

² *Hastings' Dictionary of the Bible*, extra vol., p. 91.

everywhere, in the forum, in the camp, even in the palace itself.¹ In the story of St. Paul's missionary journeys through Asia Minor and Europe, Jews and their synagogues meet us on almost every page. Around each synagogue too—not members of the household, but eager listeners on the threshold—were groups of “devout persons” who, if they threw aside the husk of Jewish ritual, yet, in those years of famine, kept their souls alive with the fine wheat of Jewish faith. It was among these, as every reader of the Acts of the Apostles will remember, that Christianity won its first and swiftest triumphs. Nor must we suffer the remembrance of Jewish hostility to the new faith to make us forgetful of all that Judaism stood for amid the darkness of those evil times. If, as Philo says, “on the Sabbath day in all cities thousands of houses of instruction are opened, in which understanding and self-restraint, and ability, and justice, and all virtues are taught,”² then we may be sure that even in the world over which Nero reigned God and duty were not left with none to bear witness to them.

Nor were the Jews the sole representatives and guardians of the moral interests of the race; paganism, too, had its great names in the first

¹ Lightfoot's *Philippians*, p. 14.

² Quoted in Schürer's article referred to above, p. 107.

century like lamps shining in a dark place. "The truth is," as Dr. Dill says, "that society in every age presents the most startling moral contrasts, and no single comprehensive description of its moral condition can ever be true. . . . That there was stupendous corruption and abnormal depravity under princes like Caligula, Nero, and Domitian, we hardly need the testimony of the satirists to induce us to believe. That there were large classes among whom virtuous instinct, and all the sober strength and gravity of the old Roman character were still vigorous and untainted, is equally attested and equally certain." ¹ Much, *e.g.*, has been written, and not more than is true, of the foul dishonouring of womanhood during the first age of the Empire; how a law had to be passed prohibiting the prostitution of women of rank, how high-born Roman matrons counted the years not

Roman Society, p. 142. A similar judgment is expressed by Merivale: "Even at Rome, in the worst of times, men of affairs, particularly those in middle stations, most removed from the temptations of luxury and poverty, were in the habitual practice of integrity and self-denial; mankind had faith in the general honesty of their equals, in the justice of their patrons, in the fidelity of their dependents: husbands and wives, parents and children, exercised the natural affections, and relied on their being reciprocated: all the relations of life were adorned in turn with bright instances of devotion, and mankind transacted their business with an ordinary confidence in the force of conscience and right reason" (Quoted in R. D. Shaw's *Pauline Epistles*, p. 178. Dr. Hatch is even more emphatic: *Hibbert Lectures*, 1888, p. 139).

by the consuls, but by their discarded or discarding husbands, with much else of a like kind. But besides this evil brood of shameless wantons Rome had within her walls faithful wives and loving mothers whose names it is good for us to recall : Pomponia Græcina the wife of Plautius, Paulina the wife of Seneca, Helvia his mother, and, perhaps most remarkable of all, Octavia the wife of Nero's youth, walking even in Nero's court with garments undefiled, her whiteness showing against the dark forms of Agrippina and Poppæa like the strangely contrasted figures which Ary Scheffer loves to paint. And if not in Rome, still less in rural Italy and in the regions beyond, were virtue and honour wholly forgotten. " In the calm of rural retreats in Lombardy or Tuscany, while the capital was frenzied with vicious indulgence, or seething with conspiracy and desolated by massacre, there were many families living in almost puritan quietude, where the moral standard was in many respects as high as among ourselves." ¹ And in one of Plutarch's letters written to his wife on the death of a little daughter during his absence from home we get glimpses of a family life the existence of which, as Archbishop Trench says, we are too apt to forget when taking account of the moral condition of the ancient heathen world. " Surely," he adds,

¹ *Roman Society*, p. 2.

“not at Chæronea alone, but in homes out of number, there must have prevailed the same simplicity, the same sobriety, the same affection, the same indifference to the pomps and vanities of the world, as in his.”¹ Public life, too, had its honourable men whose examples shamed and rebuked the cowardice and corruption of their fellows. Bad as things were in the state of Rome, they were not hopelessly bad so long as men like Burrus the prefect of the Praetorian Guard, and Thrasea the incorruptible senator, and Quintilian the teacher of rhetoric,² and the elder and younger Pliny lived to testify to nobler manners and purer laws.

But it is, of course, the Stoics who constitute the chief moral glory of the early Roman Empire. Indeed, there is no age in the world's history to which the names of Seneca, Epictetus and Marcus Aurelius would not add a new and splendid lustre. And behind them stands a crowd of others, lesser men indeed, but like-minded, and giving themselves with a certain fierceness of energy to the practical problems of life and

¹ *Plutarch*, p. 32.

² “It may be,” says Dr. Dill, “that the teaching of Quintilian had a larger share in forming the moral ideals of the Antonine age in the higher ranks than many more definitely philosophical guides, whose practice did not always conform to their doctrine” (p. 149).

conduct. We find them everywhere—in the households of the great, “the domestic chaplains of heathendom”; at the desk of the lecture-room, the forerunners of the Christian preacher; in the great city squares, on the steps of the temples—and everywhere proclaiming with the fervour of a missionary the faith that was in them.¹ That many of them were mere adventurers, intellectual acrobats, showy rhetoricians, it is impossible to deny; equally undeniable is it that it was mainly to the missionaries of Stoicism that the Empire owed that signal recovery, that “final rallying of whatever good the heathen world possessed” which marked the second century after Christ, and which, though it was powerless to avert the final collapse, did nevertheless through many years keep back the avenging hosts.² Of the

¹ “I am persuaded that we very inadequately realize to ourselves the craving for which one might venture to call ‘spiritual direction,’ borrowing this term from the later language of the Christian Church, which was felt at that time by very many, the eagerness with which the spiritual director was sought out, and the absolute obedience to his moral prescriptions which he found. Young men, desirous to order their lives according to some higher rule, others, too, of maturer age, who had the same aspiration, but who, from one cause or another, were unable to fashion or think out for themselves a satisfying rule of life, placed themselves in a relation of learners and pupils to some distinguished philosopher, attended his lectures, sought more special help and guidance from him in private and familiar intercourse” (Trench’s *Plutarch*, p. 99).

² Trench’s *Plutarch*, p. 11. “It will be found, on a closer examination, that the age in which Christianity grew was in

reality of this recovery I have no space to do more than name two or three indications. First of all, there was the awakening of a new consciousness in the minds of the rich of their obligations to the poor : “ Under the influence of the stoic teaching of the brotherhood of men and the duty of mutual help, both private citizens and benevolent princes, from Nero to M. Aurelius, created charitable foundations for the orphan and the needy.”¹ The same doctrine of fraternity left its impress, broad and deep, on Roman law. In opposition to early Roman thought Stoicism “ maintained the existence of a bond of unity among mankind which transcended or annihilated all class or national limitations.” The acceptance of this principle carried with it many changes both in the political and the domestic world : “ In the political world, the right of Roman citizenship, with the protection and the legal privileges attached to it, from being the monopoly of a small class, was gradually but very widely diffused. In the domestic sphere, the

reality an age of moral reformation. There was the growth of a higher religious morality, which believed that God was pleased by moral action rather than by sacrifice. There was a growth of a belief that life requires amendment. There was a reaction in the popular mind against the vices of the great centres of population. This is especially seen in the multiplication of religious guilds, in which purity of life was a condition of membership ” (Hatch's *Hibbert Lectures*, p. 140).

¹ *Roman Society*, p. 97.

power which the old laws had given to the father of the family, though not destroyed, was greatly abridged.”¹ Above all, we can trace the influence of Stoicism in the gradual mitigation of the hard lot of the slave. Seneca, Plutarch, and the younger Pliny, all reveal the working of a new leaven which was slowly making impossible the old barbarities. “The energy with which Seneca denounced harsh or contemptuous conduct to these humble dependents had evidently behind it the force of a steadily growing sentiment. The master who abused his power was already beginning to be a marked man.”²

The facts which have been brought together in the preceding paragraphs are sufficient to show with how little justice the condition of Roman society in the first century is depicted in hues of unrelieved blackness. The shadows are, indeed, always there; even in the second century and under the beneficent sway of the Antonines they never wholly lift; in the days of Nero and Domitian the darkness can be felt. And yet there were stars still shining even at the hour of Rome’s midnight. Why should we refuse to greet them? We add nothing to our proof of the worth of the gospel by a mean estimate of the saints of heathenism. Did

¹ Lecky’s *History of European Morals*, vol. i, p. 295 *seq.*

² Dill, p. 117.

not He who made the greater light to rule the day in which we live make also the lesser lights to rule the night in which men walked before Christ came?

IV

The better elements in Roman civilization must not be ignored; but neither must they be exaggerated. To judge the period as if no such men as Epictetus and Thrasea, and no such women as Octavia and Pomponia Græcina, had ever lived is to read history with one eye shut; but to speak as if these were in any real sense typical men and women of the time is to shut both eyes, and to reconstruct the past out of our own heads. When every allowance has been made both for what we know and for what we do not know, the judgment of St. Paul, severe as it is, remains unshaken. It is unnecessary to repeat here, even in outline, the sordid and familiar details by which that judgment can be made good; they are to be read in a hundred volumes. There is one fact, however, to which attention may be drawn and which goes far to justify the sternness of the Apostle's attitude. It has been pointed out above that one of the great presuppositions of St. Paul's gospel is the moral inability of mankind; this is the chief count in

his indictment of paganism—its powerlessness to reform and regenerate the world. If this count be sustained there is little else worth fighting about ; the minor charges may be left to the counsel on either side to argue out at their leisure ; so far as St. Paul is concerned he has secured all he seeks : a sufficient basis on which to build his argument for Christianity. Did, then, the Roman world in the first century possess within itself, and apart from any such external aid as Christianity proclaimed, an adequate power of self-recovery ? Its greed, its cruelty, its foul licentiousness, in a word its need of renewing, is questioned by none. Had it within itself moral and spiritual energy equal to the task ? The answer of the Apostle is an emphatic “ No.” Has history sustained his judgment ? Let us see.

It is plain that Rome had nothing to hope for from its old religion. “ Except, perhaps, among the peasants in the country districts,” says Lecky, “ the Roman religion, in the last years of the Republic, and in the first century of the Empire, scarcely existed, except in the state of a superstition.” For the real moral force of the time we must turn “ to the great schools of philosophy which had been imported from Greece,” and especially to the Stoics, upon whom devolved almost exclusively “ the constructive or positive side of ethical teach-

ing.”¹ These were their country's last reserves ; could they save it ? An attempt has already been made in the previous section of this chapter to do justice to the reality and greatness of the moral revival which followed upon the labours of the disciples and missionaries of Stoicism ; in what remains to be said we are completing, not contravening, what has been there put forward.

A Christian writer can have no pleasure in dwelling upon the failure of Stoicism. He is too conscious at every step of the readiness, if not always the justice, with which adroit opponents may turn his own arguments against himself to need any other warning to walk warily and choose his words well. Nevertheless, it is true, Stoicism failed, and with it perished the last hope of the ancient world. Stoicism failed, not infrequently, in the lives of those who were its acknowledged leaders and accredited exponents. And, again, it may be well, in order to avoid the appearance of partiality, to quote the words of Mr. Lecky : “ While,” he says, “ the school of Zeno produced many of the best and greatest men who have ever lived, it must be acknowledged that its records exhibit a rather unusual number of examples of high professions falsified in action, and of men who, displaying in some forms the most undoubted

¹ *History of European Morals*, vol. i, pp. 171, 177.

and transcendent virtue, fell in others far below the average of mankind.”¹ Perhaps the most conspicuous example of these “high professions falsified” is Seneca himself. Seneca’s character has been variously judged, and the difficulty, already sufficiently great, of doing him justice still further aggravated by the vehemence of rival advocates. We may be even more than usually certain that Macaulay’s biting epigrams² do not tell the whole truth and yet remain unconvinced by the ecstasies of Dr. Dill: “The man with any historical imagination,” he declares, “must be struck with amazement that such spiritual detachment, such lofty moral ideals, so pure an enthusiasm for the salvation of souls, should emerge from a palace reeking with all the crimes of the haunted races of Greek legend. That the courtier of the reigns of Caligula and Claudius, the tutor and minister of Nero, should not have escaped some stains may be probable: that such a man should have composed the letters and the *De Ira* of Seneca is almost a miracle.”³ By what term, then, shall we characterize the fact that the same man also composed the treatise *Ad Polybium de Consolatione*, the satire *Ludus de Morte Claudii Cæsaris* and the

¹ *History of European Morals*, vol. i, p. 193.

² In his essay on Bacon.

³ *Roman Society*, p. 295.

extravagant panegyric pronounced by Nero over his predecessor ? ¹ There seems no escape from the finding, severe as it is, of Lightfoot's superior judgment : " We¹ may reject as calumnies the grosser charges with which the malignity of his enemies has laden his memory ; but enough remains in the admissions of his admirers, and more than enough in the testimony of his own writings, to forfeit his character as a high-minded and sincere man." ²

Even more signal was the failure of Stoicism to effect any permanent change in the lives of the common people. Indeed, it was not with them that Stoicism for the most part concerned itself. It had many fine things to say about equality and brotherhood, but practically its outlook was limited by the cultured and well-to-do. It scourged the vices of the rich and directed the life of great households, but the tenants of the hovel and the garret it left to their poverty and meanness. And the results were what might have been anticipated. Writing of Stoicism under the Republic, Mommsen declares that, with all their show of popularity, the practical results of the new doctrines were hardly more than this, that " two or three noble

¹ For a brief summary of the facts, see Bury's *Roman Empire*, p. 256.

² Essay on St. Paul and Seneca, *Philippians*, p. 311.

houses lived on poor fare to please the Stoa.”¹ “Stoicism,” says Lightfoot, “has no other history except the history of its leaders. It consisted of isolated individuals, but it never attracted the masses or formed a community. It was a staff of professors without classes.”² Experience may well have taught us to look with suspicion on such epigrammatic summaries of a great moral movement; but in this case writers of almost every school have the same story to tell. Lecky, Church, Mahaffy, Froude, Dill, all speak of the wide gulf which divided the Roman moralists from the Roman people.³

¹ Quoted in W. W. Capes's *Stoicism*, p. 75.

² *Philippians*, p. 319.

³ I may quote, as one example, the peculiarly impressive summing-up of Dean Church: “Religion had once played a great part in what had given elevation to Roman civil life. It had had much to do with law, with political development, with Roman sense of public duty and Roman reverence for the State. But, of course, a religion of farmers and yeomen, a religion of clannish etiquettes, and family pride, and ancestral jealousies, could not long stand the competition of the Eastern faiths, or the scepticism of the cultivated classes. It went; and there was nothing to supply its place but a philosophy, often very noble and true in its language, able, I doubt not, in evil days to elevate, and comfort, and often purify its better disciples, but unable to overawe, to heal, to charm a diseased society; which never could breathe life and energy into words for the people; which wanted that voice of power which could quicken the dead letter, and command attention, where the destinies of the world were decided. I know nothing more strange and sorrowful in Roman history than to observe the absolute impotence of what must have been popular conscience, on the crimes of statesmen and

And the cause of the failure in each case—in the case of the leaders and in the case of the multitude—was the same; Stoicism lacked the dynamic by which alone its great ideals could become operative. Strong in words, it was weak in power; it had no creative energy; it could summon the forces of human nature, it could not minister to its weakness. In clear and ringing tones it pointed the way to the great bare heights of duty, but it laid no gracious constraint on unwilling feet binding them to the difficult task; and when, because of the steepness of the way, men faltered and fell, it opened to them no source of inward renewing and strength. It fills us with wonder that in such an age such ideals, so pure, so unworldly, so austere, should even have entered into men's hearts; and when we turn to the lives of Epictetus and Marcus Aurelius our wonder deepens into something like reverent awe; humanity, we feel sure, will never wind itself higher.¹ And yet how little Stoicism could do even with its chief disciple on the throne of the Empire! “Marcus Aurelius,” says Matthew Ar-

the bestial infamy of Emperors. There were plenty of men to revile them; there were men to brand them in immortal epigrams; there were men to kill them. But there was no man to make his voice heard and be respected, about righteousness, and temperance, and judgment to come” (*Gifts of Civilization*, p. 148).

¹ See an admirable passage in *Lux Mundi*, pp. 145-6.

nold,¹ “ saved his own soul by his righteousness, and he could do no more.” His example availed nothing even with his only son ; after his death the vast Empire over which he had reigned went steadily to pieces. “ In his character, beautiful as it is, there is something melancholy, circumscribed, and ineffectual.” *Ineffectual*—there in one word is history’s judgment on the greatest moral movement of the ancient world as it is represented in the life of its greatest and worthiest disciple. And this, too, is St. Paul’s reading of the facts. State the argument of the opening chapters of the Epistle to the Romans in its briefest and simplest form, and what it comes to is this : Man knows what is right, but he is powerless to do it ; Jew and Gentile alike have failed to bridge the gulf which everywhere divides knowledge and action. And it is in this universal human need, to which, as we have seen, the records of history bear so impressive a witness, that St. Paul finds the starting point of all his theology. What neither the Jewish law nor Roman Stoicism could do in that they were weak through the flesh, God has accomplished by the sending of His own Son who for us men and our salvation came down from heaven and was made man.

¹ In his *Essays in Criticism*, first series.

V

THE TWOFOLD DEBT OF THE
MINISTRY

V

THE TWOFOLD DEBT OF THE MINISTRY ¹

I AM to speak to you this evening on two important aspects of ministerial life and duty. Let me say at once that I owe the suggestion of my theme to a great Anglican saint and divine whose books are continually in my hands, and to whom, though I never either saw or heard him, I owe an almost lifelong debt—I mean the late Dean Church. In his volume, *Human Life and its Conditions*, which, small as it is, contains three or four of the greatest sermons in the English language, there is a noble discourse based on the words of St. Paul, *I am debtor both to Greeks and to Barbarians, both to wise and foolish*, and entitled “The Twofold Debt of the Clergy.” Church reminds us of the interval, so strangely broad and deep, between the Greek and the Barbarian, between the wise and the unwise, between those who can know and think and

¹ An address to the students of the Theological Colleges of Manchester.

those who cannot. It is, as he says, a very rough division, admitting of endless differences of degree, and with much shading off where its boundaries meet ; but, rough as the division is, it is very real. And alike to those on this side of the gulf and on that we are called to minister. We have to deal with ignorance and coarseness, and we have to deal with culture and refinement. We have to serve those who know a great deal and those who know scarcely anything. With one hand we touch what is lowest in the social scale, with the other what is very high. And to both, to Greek and Barbarian, to wise and foolish, to those who know and to those who do not, we are debtors.

St. Paul's terms do not, of course, cover the whole field. There are multitudes for whom we should be baffled to find a place with any sense of reality in either of these divisions. I do not forget this, and if I pass over much that is important let me remind you in advance that I am not attempting to compass the whole circle of ministerial obligation ; I am only seeking to touch it at two selected points ; and if at these two points I can say anything that is true and timely and helpful I shall have accomplished to the full all that I proposed to myself in coming to speak to you to-night.

I

And first, then, of those whom St. Paul calls *Barbarians* and *foolish* and of our debt to them. Whom do we mean by these? We mean those whom Jesus, in His more kindly, compassionate way, spoke of as *sheep not having a shepherd, the multitudes distressed and scattered*, those whom He called *the least, the last, the lost*; the poor, the ignorant, the untaught; the drunken, the vicious, the profligate. Our debt to these none for a moment will question. We are bound to them by every tie that binds us to Christ and His Church. To ignore them would be to deny and to disown the Master whom we serve. *When John heard in the prison the works of Christ, he sent by his disciples, and said unto Him, Art thou He that cometh, or look we for another? And Jesus answered and said unto them, Go your way and tell John the things which ye do hear and see: the blind receive their sight, and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised up and—what, is there anything beyond that? The dead are raised up—is not that the top note in the crescendo? No; it is not; there is something more and beyond: and the poor have good tidings preached to them.* And if we have no message for these—the poor, the ignorant, the unprivileged—not yet are

we baptized into the baptism of Christ. Our obligation here may be stated in two ways.

1. There is, first, our debt to the untaught. I wonder if we realize how strangely deep and wide is the gulf which knowledge puts between man and man. We make a great deal, as well we may, of the gulf between rich and poor ; but that is a gulf in men's circumstances, this is in themselves. A minister may cross and recross the gulf two or three times in the course of a single afternoon's visitation. On the one hand, there are those "to whom," as Dean Church says, "without any extraordinary gifts the general order of things is familiar, a society where what has happened in the world and what is known of it lies open, and where the inherited thoughts and experience of former times are a common possession, where books and conversation and long use have more or less widened men's ways of thinking, and perhaps made them exact, inquiring, and impartial." And, on the other hand, there are those "to whom the heavens mean nothing at all, and the earth only the field where day after day, from sunrise to night, they toil in the frost and in the heat for their coarse meals ; who know their work and measure all other knowledge by it ; to whom everything outside them is bounded and hidden by an impenetrable cloud, broken only by the most fantastic

delusions ; whose meagre list of words hardly reaches beyond the expression of the necessities of life and the simplest elementary emotions of the soul." Who can measure the interval which divides these from those ? Yet these not less than those are we sworn to serve by all the vows of our holy office.

It is a difficult task ; how difficult only they know who have tried to fulfil it. These whom we must serve seem to live encased in hard, impenetrable shells. They are our fellow-countrymen, yet they hardly speak the same language. Our points of view, the things we take for granted, the whole background and furniture of our mental life, are different. And then—God forgive us that it should be so !—people of this sort are often so uninteresting, so unattractive. How indeed should it be otherwise where life is so narrow, so poor, so trivial ? And is it any marvel if, from these endless stretches of drab monotony, shot through with no gleams of gold or scarlet, we sometimes turn away to find a life more rich, more full, more varied ? And yet, again I say, to these also we are debtors, debtors not less but rather more just because it is so hard to serve them, so hard even to understand them.

What, then, shall we do ? There are many things we may do ; there is one thing we must do : we

must understand ; we must get inside that hard, encasing shell ; we must discover and interpret to themselves these struggling, voiceless souls. And, difficult as it is, it can be done. To a true sympathy all things are possible. Sympathy is the sixth sense ; it is the magic key that unlocks the sealed doors of the spirit.

Touched by a sympathy within,
He knows our feeble frame.

And with sympathy knowledge always comes. This is one of the great lessons of the life of Jesus. " Christ is the only one," says James Smetham, " who never expects you to be other than *yourself*, and He puts in abeyance towards you all but what is like you. He takes your view of things and mentions no other. He takes the old woman's view of things by the wash-tub, and has a great interest in wash-powder ; Sir Isaac Newton's view of things, and wings among the stars with him ; the artist's view, and feeds among the lilies ; the lawyer's, and shares the justice of things. But He never plays the lawyer, or the philosopher, or the artist to the old woman. He is above that littleness." That was the sympathy of Jesus ; and what miracles it worked ! " Christ had the power," says that strange and wayward genius, the author of *De Profundis*, " of not merely saying beautiful

things Himself, but of making other people say beautiful things to Him.” And yet it was among just such as I have been speaking of—the dull, the ignorant, the untaught—that most of His life was spent. Common folk uninteresting, unattractive? When we have learned to look on them with the eyes of Christ, then, like a skilful diver, we shall know how to bring up from those dark, oozy depths all manner of flashing pearls. To see the divine in grey and commonplace lives, to show God’s infinite sky over-arching them all—this is our task.

2. There is our debt to the vicious and the profligate. And here at once a hundred questions and problems present themselves at which I may not even glance. For the moment it must suffice to say one thing, and it is this: that we may discharge this debt we must hold fast to, we must be held fast by, our faith in Christ as Saviour. It is not, perhaps, until a man is set down in the midst of the vice and squalor of a great city, or in some way gives himself for the redemption of the lives of individual men and women, that he begins to discover what a tangled, matted mass it is with which he has to deal. The might of evil he is never suffered to forget. Forget it? why, it contests every inch of the ground with him; it mocks and mouths at him from every street corner. And if

he is not to be overborne by it he must learn to meet and match it with the might of Christ. “Went to the condemned felons in Newgate,” John Wesley writes in his *Journal*, September 17, 1738, “and offered them free salvation.” Our gospel, the gospel we preach, the gospel we believe—will it stand a test like that? Is there anything in it for felons in a condemned cell? “I was once,” said John Newton, “a wild thing on the coast of Africa, but the Lord caught me and tamed me, and now folks come to see me as they go to see the lions in the Tower. Doubt if the Lord can convert the heathen! Look at me.” Do we believe that Christ is still able after that fashion to save to the uttermost? But, after all, the supreme and sufficient touchstone is the New Testament itself. And surely one of the most wonderful things in that book—when one comes to think of it, one of the most singular and solemn things in history—is the confidence which breathes through all its pages that at last the routine of vice and sin has met its match, that through Christ goodness and purity are now possible to all men. *Fornicators, idolaters, adulterers, thieves, covetous, drunkards, revilers, extortioners. . . . and such were some of you : but ye were washed, but ye were sanctified, but ye were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, and in the Spirit of our God.* What a

throb of triumph is in the words, and how strangely they thrill us to this day ! And the confidence was Paul's because first it was Christ's. When Jesus saw such as those whom we see to-day, and seeing almost sicken with despair, He saw not rank and rotting weeds, but waving harvests, *fields white already unto harvest*. He said that the least might be greatest, and the last might be first, and the lost might be found. Again I ask, do we believe this ? That Christ is the symbol of humanity's best we are all ready to declare. But He is more than this ; He is the Redeemer of humanity's worst. Is this also our faith ? That He is there on the heights, life's far-shining ideal, we know ; but we need Him here, too, in the depths, hard by the vice and sin of men, else our strength will fail us and our tasks prove too many for us.

In one of Mary Wilkins's exquisite sketches of New England life she tells the story of a woman whose fame was bright among the poor and lawless, whom she sought to succour. But she was not a believer, she never "went to meeting," and when a boyish young minister tried to reason with her she put aside his arguments with a smile. But one whom she had befriended became a murderer, and she had with infinite reluctance to surrender him to justice. The next Sunday she went to church for the first time in twenty-five years. " ' I ain't

got much to say about it,' said she, ' but I'm goin' to say this much—it ain't no more'n right I should, though I don't believe in a lot of palaver about things like this—I've made up my mind that I'm goin' to believe in Jesus Christ. I ain't never, but I'm goin' to now, for '—Luella's voice turned shrill with passion—'*I don't see any other way out of it for John Gleason.*' ” And there *is* no other way ; let us see to it we keep that way open.

II

I turn to our debt to those who know, to those whom Paul calls the *Greeks* and the *wise*.

It would be interesting to study the Apostle's words in the light of his own life and work. It used to be taken for granted that the first generation of Christians was drawn almost exclusively from the ranks of the poor and ignorant. Of late, however, evidence has been accumulating which seriously modifies the old conclusion. Indeed, Sir W. M. Ramsay does not hesitate to declare that, at least in Asia Minor, the ruder and less civilized any district was the slower was Christianity in permeating it, and that it was just where the Greek spirit and Greek education were most completely dominant that the new religion achieved its swiftest and most signal triumphs. However this

may be, there can be no question about the obligation of the Christian minister of to-day: he is debtor to knowledge and culture no less than to poverty and ignorance. And just here there emerges one of our gravest practical problems. I do not want to exaggerate. We are undoubtedly living in transitional and critical times. But has there ever been an age which did not seem, to those who were passing through it, to be big with possible peril to Christian faith? It has been humorously suggested that the authentic words spoken by Adam to Eve as they stepped through the gates of the Garden of Eden were: "We are living in times of transition." Mankind caught the trick of speech, and we have been living in times of transition ever since. Nevertheless, without indulging in any wholly futile comparisons between to-day and yesterday, there can be no doubt about the gravity of the situation which confronts the Christian teacher to-day. "Minds are busy all round us"—the words were spoken more than forty years ago, but they are as true as if they had been spoken yesterday—"minds are busy all round us, asking questions, pushing conclusions, examining foundations, interpreting facts; doing all this with unlooked-for and startling results; changing the look and proportions of the most familiar things, finding new objects for men's interest; and, amid

much that is full of glorious promise, letting us see prospects of the most tremendous meaning."

Some years ago it was decided by the directors of the Great Western Railway to bring their system into harmony with the other railway systems of the country by the substitution of the usual narrow for the old broad-gauge rails which until then had been used by them. By a remarkable feat of organizing skill the work was carried through and the whole line from Paddington to Plymouth relaid during the thirty-six hours between Saturday night and Monday morning. It is a task not unlike that which continually faces the Christian Church: it has to find new rails for the new knowledge which comes with each new generation. It is not work that can be done in a hurry, but it has to be done, and we must each take our part in doing it. The work, I say, has to be done. After what has already been said no one, I hope, will accuse me of any lack of sympathy with ardent evangelism—I may be pardoned for reminding you that for eighteen years I did the work of an evangelist in a large City Mission—but we are living in a fool's paradise if we imagine that all the problems of the modern Church can be solved by Central Halls or the methods of the Salvation Army. To-day, not only the doctrines but the moral ideals of Christianity are challenged by

voices both loud and confident ; and if faith cannot justify itself both to the mind and conscience of men its day will soon be over.

Nor can we find any refuge in the facile suggestions of those who tell us that the Church will best solve her intellectual problems by giving herself with whole-hearted devotion to practical service. Practical service will, of course, make its contribution even in the intellectual realm, as it has always done, but it will still remain true that the questions which the intellect raises the intellect must answer, and that when wise men go wrong wiser men, not simply more pious men, must put them right. The opportunities of action can and ought to furnish no escape from the responsibilities of thought. This being so, there are three things which we shall do well to lay to heart.

1. Let us have done once for all with our foolish fears. All truth, no matter who may be the discoverer of it, Charles Darwin or Julius Wellhausen, is God's truth, and whatever havoc it may make among some of the little tin deities which we have so long and so fondly cherished, in the end it can only do us good to know it. "Sit down before fact as a little child," Huxley once wrote in a famous letter to Charles Kingsley, "sit down before fact as a little child ; be prepared to give up every preconceived notion, follow humbly wherever and

to whatever abysses nature leads, or you shall learn nothing.” “I have only begun,” he went on, “to learn content and peace of mind since I have resolved at all risks to do this.” It may, I think, be doubted if Huxley himself remembered his own wise canon when he came to deal with the facts of religion. Nevertheless, the canon is a just one, and it is part of every Christian teacher’s bounden duty to cultivate the true scientist’s sense of the sacredness of fact.

2. We must prepare ourselves to mediate to the men of our time the new knowledge, and particularly the new knowledge about the Bible, which is one of God’s gifts to this generation. The task is one of almost infinite difficulty, and the demand which sometimes it makes upon our courage is equalled only by that which it always makes upon our caution. Nevertheless, difficult as the task is, it is part of the work which we are called into the ministry to accomplish. I have nothing extreme or heroic to suggest, but I may perhaps remind you that the policy, which in some quarters still finds favour, of going about in felt slippers and whispering under our breath, “A revolution is taking place, but for heaven’s sake say nothing about it,” is simply a policy of despair. We cannot, if we would, keep from the intelligent youth of our Churches facts which are the common-

places of Biblical study in almost every divinity school throughout Christendom ; the schoolmaster and the journalist will see to that. And we ought not if we could. The truth which has helped us, wisely presented, will help others. They have a right to it, and they have a right to it at our hands.

3. And all this means that we ourselves must know. "We owe it," says the great Anglican whose words I quoted at the outset, "we owe it to the Church, we owe it to the time in which God has called us to labour, we owe it to the restless and perplexed, but often honest minds in whose presence we carry on our ministry, to be not merely a hard-working, but a learned clergy." And if this seem a hard saying, at least let us realize that we owe it to the Church, and to the age which we are called to serve, to be students, to be learners, to be thinkers, not only in our college days, but throughout our ministry, and to the very end.

III

Debtor to Greeks and Barbarians, to wise and to foolish—there is our double task, and it is at our peril that we neglect either half of it. Once in Cromwell's Parliament it is said that prayer was offered that they that have zeal may have know-

ledge, and that they that have knowledge may have zeal. It is in the answer to that twofold petition that there lies the hope of the Church to-day. If any one desires to discuss which is the more important, the zeal or the knowledge, he is, of course, at liberty to do so, but I must be excused from joining in the discussion. It is like discussing which foot is the more necessary, the right or the left. We need both, and without either all progress is at an end. And perhaps one reason why in the work of the Church we have often made such little headway is that we have been content to hop on one foot when God meant us to walk or run on both. *We preach, admonishing every man, and teaching every man, in all wisdom, that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus.* Mark the repetition of the universals—*every man, perfect, in all wisdom*—and their designed protest against every kind of exclusiveness. This is the true ideal, and whatever falls short of it falls short of the true goal of the Christian ministry.

I do not mean, of course, that every man is called to combine in himself the duties and responsibilities of both the evangelist and the scholar. No man's arms, General Booth is reported to have said at the beginning of his great work, are long enough to enable him to give a hand to the rich and to the people of the depths ; and he made his

choice accordingly. But saving hands have to be held out to all if the gospel is not to fail in its purpose. Therefore, if it is too much to hope that our scholars should be our evangelists and our evangelists our scholars, at least, instead of the miserable suspicions and jealousies which so often prevail, let the scholar learn to recognize in the evangelist a fellow-labourer, and let the evangelist seek to understand and to know how to use the work of the scholar, and let each rejoice that his own lack of service is being made good by the service of the other.

Debtor to Greeks and Barbarians, to wise and to foolish : is the double burden too heavy for us ? Then let us turn our eyes to the past. History, as Bishop Lightfoot used to say, is the best cordial for drooping spirits. Think what Christianity has faced through all the centuries of its history, from the first to the twentieth, what vastly varying conditions of race, and time, and country it has dealt with, and yet never once has been compelled to withdraw from the field and acknowledge itself beaten. “ It has dealt,” I quote Dean Church yet once more, “ with ignorance and coarseness, and it has dealt with culture and refinement. It has dealt with power and it has dealt with poverty, infirmity, and sorrow. And it has dealt with the profound differences which are made between man

and man by mental endowments and by knowledge. It has dealt with the responsibilities of intellect and freedom and with the need to be taught and guided. And in this long trial and testing it has not broken down.” No ; it has not broken down and it will not, but in our day and in our hands, if we be found faithful, it will prove itself once more to be God’s infinite answer to man’s infinite need.

VI

CHRISTIAN AGNOSTICISM: A UNIVERSITY
SERMON

VI

CHRISTIAN AGNOSTICISM: A UNIVERSITY SERMON

We know in part . . . We see in a mirror darkly
(1 Cor. xiii. 9, 12)

We know in part : so, then, there is a Christian as well as an anti-Christian agnosticism. Indeed, as some one has truly said, we must all be agnostics if only we put our agnosticism in the right place ; and it is this Christian agnosticism of which I wish to speak just now. In other words—for the phrase is really much too pretentious for the simple things I have to put before you—I want to remind you of the limits which God Himself has set to that which we may know even in the realm of religion. There are, as the Old Testament reminds us, things that are revealed and that belong unto us and to our children ; and there are secret things which belong unto the Lord our God. It is of these secret, unrevealed things that we are to think to-day. *We know in part ; we see in a mirror darkly.*

I

And at the outset let us understand exactly what St. Paul means. I have quoted his words as they stand in the Revised Version rather than in the more familiar rendering of the older version. *We see through a glass darkly* fails to reproduce the Apostle's figure. He was thinking not of objects dimly seen through a window—of horn or some kindred substance—but faintly reflected in a mirror. For the mirrors of Paul's day, not being like ours of silvered glass but of burnished metal, made but poor reflectors. And such, St. Paul says, are all the means—Nature, the Old Testament, even the gospel itself—by which God is revealed to man. In all these we see at best but a reflection, often uncertain, always imperfect, of the eternal realities on which hereafter we shall gaze face to face.

The same idea is suggested by the words which follow, and which in both versions are translated *darkly*. But here again the rendering does not quite convey the Apostle's thought. He does not mean we see dimly because our vision is so dim ; that, of course, is true, but that is not what he says. The words are, literally, "in an enigma," "in a dark saying" ; and what St. Paul has in his mind is not the dimness of our vision but the obscurity and imperfection of the revelation. Apart from the

feebleness of our power to know, everything is not fully made known. The gospel is a revelation of God, but it is not a full revelation. Revelation means the lifting up of the veil ; but the veil, Paul says, is not wholly lifted ; there are some things which still lie in the darkness wherein it has pleased God they should be hid from the beginning.

And this, as every careful reader knows, is a note which the Bible often strikes. It is the book of revelation. Therein is made known *the mystery which hath been hid from all ages and generations*. Nevertheless, all has not been told. Light has come into the world, but the light shineth in the darkness ; there are shadows that will not flee. Christ has spoken, and we have heard Him ; but, though He has told us many things, He has still many things to say unto us, for not yet are we able to bear them ; still He leaves us, as sometimes of old He left His disciples, with knitted brows and unanswered questions : *What is this that He saith unto us, A little while, and ye behold Me not ; and again a little while, and ye shall see Me : and, Because I go to the Father. What is this that He saith, A little while ? We know not what He saith.*

II

In theory, of course, we are all ready to recognize the limitations of our knowledge. The

trouble is that in daily life we so quickly forget them.

Take, for example, the history of Christian theology. "A constant tendency to apologize for human speech, a great element of agnosticism, an awful sense of unfathomed depths beyond the little that is made known, is always present," Bishop Gore says, "to the minds of theologians who know what they are about in conceiving or expressing God." Well, if this is true—and no one, I imagine, is likely to question its truth—the plain man can only conclude that there must have been very many theologians who did not know what they were about. Think how men have marched through all the mystery of things in a blaze of certainty, how they have tried to define the indefinable, and sometimes have been ready to excommunicate the rest of us because, perchance, we did not find their little definitions adequate! As if you could pour the whole ocean of truth into our tiny tea-cups! In the eighteenth century some one published a book with this amazing title, *The Existence of God Mathematically Demonstrated*. But God is more than a problem to be worked out like a clever school-boy's sum on a slate. "Who fathoms the eternal thought"? Who by searching can find out God? His judgments are unsearchable, His ways past tracing out; and

when we speak as if they were all known to us, what is it but as if the tiny minnow, familiar with the pebbles and crannies of its little creek, should pretend to understand the ocean with its tides and currents and trade winds ?

Nor is it theologians alone who have been at fault. We are all more or less in the same condemnation. We are like little children who ask big questions and want a plain " yes " or " no " in reply where, in the very nature of the case, no plain " yes " or " no " can be given. We have no sense of the mystery which hems us in on every side. Truth's outlines must always rise sharp and clean-cut like an Alpine height against a winter sky. We are ashamed or afraid to say, " I do not know."

III

To-day, happily, there are signs that we are coming to a wiser mind ; and it is only fair to say that it is the theologians themselves who are leading the way. Some one once remarked of the Jesuits that they shortened the commandments and lengthened the creeds. Well, we are not going to shorten the commandments ; some ominous exceptions notwithstanding, man's moral sense grows keener every day, and a vigorous ethic

is one of the healthiest signs of the times ; but we are going to shorten the creeds. It matters not where you look, on every side the Church's teachers are recognizing and proclaiming that the burden of things to be believed must be lightened, that the compass of our creeds must be narrowed. We must draw, said one of the wisest of our Scottish theological teachers in his inaugural lecture, we must draw and that in earnest "the distinction between verities and problems" ; we must "map off the realm of certitudes from the region in which assurance is unattainable." And another, greatly daring, takes in hand to show us how we may do it. Dr. Denney would have us abolish all our present doctrinal tests and substitute for them this simple declaration : "I believe in God through Jesus Christ His only Son our Lord and Saviour." Now, whether Dr. Denney be right or not, of this we may be sure, that when one of the foremost teachers of a Church which has been conspicuous among the Churches for its tenacious adherence to formula commits himself to a suggestion like this, the day of elaborate confessions, with their trenchant handling of great mysteries, is far spent.

Let me indicate, by way of illustration, one or two matters in regard to which the frank recognition of our ignorance is urgently called for.

1. Take, for example, our doctrine of man.

Man, we know, is a sinner, yet made for God, and capable through Christ of being restored to God. These things we know ; these are religious certainties which lie within the reach of every man's experience. But how man came to be what he is, his origin, the origin of his life, the origin of his sin—these things we do not know. Or rather, let me say, if knowledge on these matters is to be had it must come to us through the progress of science ; it is not to be found in Scripture. The first three chapters of Genesis, on which so much misspent ingenuity has been wasted, are not science and are not history. Truth there is in them, but it is moral and religious truth, and that no advance in knowledge can take from us. But when, not content with this, we insist on finding there scientific truth, and when we use this “science falsely so-called” to withstand the conclusions of the geologist or biologist of to-day, we only reveal how completely we have misunderstood the purpose for which these chapters were put into our hands.

2. And as we must confess our ignorance of man's origin, so also must we confess our ignorance of his destiny. Christ, we know, has brought life and immortality to light through the gospel. Sin drags after it, by howsoever long a chain, its own dire consequences. These things, again, we know ; they are among the surest of human experiences.

But there the curtain falls ; “ the rest remaineth unrevealed.”

Lord, said one, *are they few that be saved ?* And men have gone on asking like questions ever since. But Jesus refused to answer. To all such He has but one reply : *It is not for you to know.* And yet still we go on discussing the affairs of the world to come, saying what is to happen at death and judgment, who are to be lost, and who are to be saved, as if a chart of the future lay unrolled before our eyes, and doing it all sometimes with a quiet, easy confidence which may well make sensitive souls shudder. It is all wrong ; it is all wrong. These are the things that the Father hath set within His own authority. Who are we that we should dare to break the silence of Christ ? Who are we that we should seek to pick the lock of God’s shut door ? There are things that are revealed, and they belong unto us and to our children ; and there are secret things which belong only to God ; in heaven’s name let us leave them there.

3. But the matter in regard to which the reminder of our ignorance is most sharply needed is the method of the Divine government, the ways of God with men. There is, indeed, something truly amazing in the confidence with which men will embark on these high themes. Listen to the talk

that goes on daily in Christian circles all about us, and mark how strangely sure men seem that to them has been made known the mind and purpose of the Eternal. I have known a little child die, and when all the house was dark, and all the chambers emptied of delight, and the mother's heart well-nigh breaking, I have known some miserable Job's comforter suggest that it was because she loved her child too well, and therefore God had taken the little one out of her arms. What presumption and what ignorance ! As if the great Father grudged us our poor human loves ! And as if love were like a slice of cake, so that the more you give to some one here the less will there be for another there !

One Sunday, a few years ago, a young man and his wife ventured on to the great ice bridge which, as sometimes happens during a very severe winter, had formed beneath the falls at Niagara. Suddenly and without warning, there was a crack and a slip, and the great ice masses began to move down the stream, and in sight of a crowd of helpless onlookers both were borne down to a swift and horrible death in the rapids below. It happened, I say, on a Sunday. A few days later a letter appeared in one of the leading Canadian daily papers openly suggesting that the incident was a divine judgment, that it was God's way of vindicating the honour of

His holy day ! Why, why must we think it needful to explain everything ? Are we in the secret counsels of the Most High ? Do we imagine that every accident is a divine judgment upon some one or other ? Have we never read what Jesus said : *Those eighteen upon whom the tower in Siloam fell and killed them, think ye that they were offenders above all the men that dwell in Jerusalem ? I tell you, Nay.* Rabbi, said the disciples of Jesus, *who did sin, this man or his parents, that he should be born blind ?* And again, with sharp decisiveness, Jesus answered, *Neither.* There are more things in heaven and earth than are dreamed of in our philosophy.

Is not this one of the great lessons of the book of Job ? From beginning to end it is one long, passionate protest against the idea that we can crush God into some little formula of our own devising. The three friends come to visit Job sitting on his dust-heap. "Oh, yes," say they, "we can explain all these things that have come upon thee. Thou art a sinner ; confess thy sin and repent and turn to God, and the sun shall shine upon thee again as of old." So in their ignorance they chattered ; but the book tears their flimsy talk to rags, and in the end, while Job is vindicated, the three friends are silenced and put to shame. Mark, Job still does not know why the righteous

suffer. The problem is no more solved at the end of the book than it is at the beginning. Job is as far as ever from knowing why all these hideous calamities have come upon him. But here is the difference : at the beginning of the book he is ignorant and defiant ; at its close he is ignorant and trustful. There he stands with set lips, and clenched hands, and head thrown back, daring God to do His worst ; here he stands with bent head, and folded hands, silent and submissive. What has wrought the change ? He has seen God :

*I had heard of Thee by the hearing of the ear ;
But now mine eye seeth Thee.*

And because he has seen God, though still he does not know, he is content not to know.

And in the maddening maze of things,
When tossed by storm and flood,
To one fixed ground his spirit clings,
He knows that God is good.

And into the deep, dark mystery of pain perhaps that is as far as we shall ever be able to penetrate. We ask the inevitable questions, inevitable but unavailing, for the heavens give back no answer. Why did He suffer the blow to fall which crippled us for the race while as yet it had scarce begun ? Why, when our little one lay dying, and we who

would have done all could do nothing, why did He seem so deaf, so cold, so far? Why did He pluck the one sweet flower that grew in our home, and leave it desert? Had He not flowers enough in His own great heavens? *My God, my God, why——?* Questions like these are naked swords that pierce the hand that tries to grasp them. Why? We do not know, we cannot tell, we must wait. One day He will tell us all things, we shall see face to face, we shall know as we are known. But now *we know in part; we see in a mirror, darkly.*

IV

“Christian Agnosticism”—does it seem a strange word on the lips of a Methodist preacher? Certainly the first Methodists did not know it, and if they had would not have used it. They spoke rather of what they called “assurance.” They were not afraid to say, “We know.” They belonged, and were proud to belong, to those whom, in her half scornful way, Mrs. Humphry Ward calls “the certain people.” Yes; but let us not forget in what region their great certainties lay. They knew whom they had believed; they knew the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ; they knew the power of His Resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings; they knew that they had passed out

of death into life. And God help “the people called Methodists,” or any other people who profess and call themselves Christians, who do not know these things. But these are not the things we have been thinking of to-day ; these are the things that are revealed, the things that belong unto us and to our children, the things that can be vouched for in Christian experience. And can we not see—for it is always a part of true knowledge to know where knowledge stops—that one sure way by which we may become more certain of these certain things is to see to it that we keep them sifted and separate from the uncertain things, of which God keeps the key and not man ?

I have but one thing to add. *We know in part ; but we know. We see in a mirror, darkly ; but we see.* Our knowledge is limited, but it is real, and it is sufficient. I received once, from an eminent scholar, a letter in reply to a question I had addressed to him. The handwriting was unusually crabbed even for a scholar, and though the letter as a whole was quite intelligible to me, and met my difficulty, there was one word in it that I have never been able to decipher ; nevertheless, the letter gave me the answer I sought. Is it not something like that with the Bible ? There are things in it which we are sometimes sorely puzzled to know what to do with or what to make of ; but

if we know ourselves and our own need, and therefore what questions to ask of it, it will not fail us. And if it does not—and it does not—answer all our questions, it does a better thing : it brings us face to face with the great Answerer.

Thy word is a lamp unto my feet. I never hear or read the familiar word but a little picture of childhood's days comes back to me : a dark night in the month of March, a walk with a shepherd through lonely fields, and a swinging lantern which the shepherd carried in his hand. All around us lay the great wall of the night, unpierced by any ray of light ; yet we walked at ease and in safety, for we had always light on our path, light to walk by. And this is the light God gives us in His word—not light yonder, light everywhere, light on life's far horizon ; but light here, light on my path, light to walk by. “ And in that light of life I'll walk ”—say it with me, will you ?—“ till travelling days are done.”

VII

DEAN CHURCH: AN APPRECIATION

VII

DEAN CHURCH: AN APPRECIATION

DEAN CHURCH died on December 10, 1890. The year that saw his passing had been one of many losses to the English Church and to English Christianity. Within a few months of each other, Bishop Lightfoot, John Henry Newman, and Canon Liddon had all passed away. But for some at least the Dean's death was the heaviest blow of all. He had not, it is true, Lightfoot's erudition, nor Liddon's eloquent tongue, nor Newman's dazzling subtlety; to many, indeed, it will seem sheer perversity to bracket his name with the great Oxford leader. If it be so, so be it. This paper makes no pretence to being a sober, critical estimate; it is the acknowledgment of a debt, a personal and almost life-long debt; and for myself I can only say that I would gladly barter everything that Liddon ever wrote for one volume of Dean Church, and that nothing that either Lightfoot or Newman has done for me can even be compared with what I have learned from him. I never saw

him, I never heard him, I never had any communication with him, I know him only through his books, and yet, if I know myself, Methodist and Nonconformist as I am, it is to him more than to any other man that I owe my own soul. That is why I have undertaken to write this paper.

I

I shall make no attempt to tell over again, even in outline, the story of Dean Church's life. A few leading dates may be given ; for the rest I must be content to refer the reader to Miss Church's beautiful *Life* of her father, of which perhaps it is enough to say that it is a book such as her father himself might have read with approval. Church was born in 1815, and his seventy-five years fall into four periods of curiously equal length. In 1833, when he was eighteen years of age, he entered as a student at Oxford. Nineteen years later he accepted the living at Whatley, a tiny village in Somersetshire. There he remained for nineteen years more, until, in 1871, Gladstone persuaded him to accept the Deanery of St. Paul's Cathedral. Another nineteen years brings us to 1890, the time of his death.

Of the various influences which gave to Church's mind and character their individual bent, some-

thing will appear as we proceed. But there was one, so strong from the beginning and so persistent to the end of his career, that something should be said regarding it at once : I mean, of course, the influence of Newman, and of the whole movement of which Newman was the head. The year in which Church went to Oxford—1833—was the year in which Keble preached in St. Mary's the famous sermon which Newman tells us he always regarded as the beginning of the movement.¹ Three years later, from the same pulpit, Newman himself preached a sermon to which in after-life Church was wont to look back as “ in some sort the turning-point of his life.”² And, indeed, no one who knew anything of the two men could miss all through the life of the disciple the hand of the master. “ You,” wrote Dr. (now Bishop) Talbot, to the Dean when Newman's long life was over, “ you have done more, so much more, than any one to carry on and convey to us the touch of his special spiritual and mental power.”³ And though Church's modesty put by the crown of such high praise—“ it does make me feel such a fool,” he said in reply, “ to be spoken of in the same breath with him ”—yet no one knew so well as he how much of what was best in him he owed to Newman. Even

¹ *Apologia*, p. 35.

² *Life and Letters*, p. 17.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 346.

in so secondary a matter as style, it is, he tells a correspondent, to Newman that he owes it, if he can write at all simply, and with the wish to be real.¹ But though he was always Newman's disciple, Church was far too strong a man to be Newman's slave. He knew his own mind, he chose his own path, and when the need arose he did not hesitate, not only to break away from his leader, but to criticize and condemn him. The Oxford Movement has been very variously judged ; it was indeed a movement of mingled good and ill. It is easy to praise it, easier still perhaps to blame it ; what is not easy is to be fair to it ; and even yet, perhaps, after all that has been written upon it, the final word has not been spoken. But this at least will be admitted, by friend and foe alike, that whatever of good was in it came to its finest flower and fruit in Richard William Church.

II

It is time now to take some note of the literary legacy which Church has bequeathed to us, and upon which, of course, our judgment of him must be largely based. For convenience' sake it may be divided into three groups : his work as a journalist, as an historian and man of letters, and as a preacher.

¹ *Life and Letters*, p. 326.

1. Of Church's work as a journalist I can say very little. In mere bulk it far exceeds his output either as an historian or as a preacher, but I am familiar only with that comparatively small portion of it which Miss Church has rescued from the buried files of the *Guardian*, the *Times*, and the *Saturday Review*, and reprinted in the two volumes of *Occasional Papers* which are now included in the collected edition of her father's works. Much the largest part of his journalistic work was done in the columns of the *Guardian*. That paper was founded in 1846, a few months after the secession of Newman, by a group of young High Churchmen, in order to maintain and promote within the English Church the distinctive principles of the Oxford Movement. Church was a regular contributor from the beginning, writing not only a weekly review, but an immense number of articles on the political questions of the day. After his appointment to St. Paul's in 1871 his contributions became much less frequent, yet, at the time of his death, his reviews and articles in that paper alone amounted, we are told, to over a thousand.¹

Two incidents in Church's career as a journalist are perhaps worth recalling. The early days of the infant *Guardian* were full of trouble. When it was only six months old its life was despaired of

¹ See Preface to *Occasional Papers* and *Life and Letters*, p. 61.

even by a friend as sympathetic and discerning as J. B. Mozley. "The fate of the *Guardian*," he writes to his sister, "is, I am afraid, sealed. The circulation keeps obstinately stationary, and B. [Bernard, one of the founders of the journal] has given his decided opinion that, after notice given, it must be dropped."¹ An article by young Church, however, saved the situation. Oddly enough, it was not a religious but a scientific article. "The journal which had been started to sustain a Church revival was saved from an early death by its appreciation of physical science." As early as March of that year Church had written an article on the controversy which broke out after the publication of the *Vestiges of Creation*,² which had won the commendation of Sir Richard Owen. A second article from the same pen a few months later, describing the method and character of Le Verrier's discovery of the planet Neptune, drew a grateful letter from the great astronomer himself. "*At last*," Church writes to Mozley, "we have got quoted in a morning paper, the *Daily News*, by help of Le Verrier's letter. We may be caught out in some 'floor,' but if we are not, I shall be very proud of the planet all my life long."³

¹ *Letters of the Rev. J. B. Mozley*, p. 178.

² The article is reprinted in *Occasional Papers*, vol. i, p. 53.

³ See an article in the Jubilee number of the *Guardian*, January

The second incident is of a wholly different character. When *Ecce Homo* appeared in 1866, Church wrote a long and remarkable review of it.¹ The book, as every one knows, was published anonymously, and there were many guesses at its unknown author. Since the publication of the letters of Church's intimate friend, Lord Blachford,² it has turned out that Church wrote his review under the impression that *Ecce Homo* was the work of Newman ! Is it to be wondered that, in face of so strange a blunder by so qualified a judge, some have been led to ask whether in other fields of critical inquiry men may not be hanging on differences or similarities of language and style a weight which they are wholly unable to bear ?³

There are few among the world's great workers the net result of whose work it is more difficult accurately to estimate than the journalist, but in Dean Church's case it was certainly very great. The *Guardian* has long been the most influential journal in English Church circles ; and for more than a quarter of a century his was the clearest and strongest voice in its councils. When his

22, 1896. It is worthy of note that the *Daily News* and the *Guardian* both issued their first numbers on the same day.

¹ *Occasional Papers*, vol. ii, p. 133.

² *Letters of Lord Blachford*, pp. 260-2.

³ See, for example, Sir W. Robertson Nicoll's *Church's One Foundation* (Pop. ed.), p. 39,

party was reeling under the shock of Newman's secession, and the hearts of many were failing them through fear, it was he more than any other who became the rallying-point of the scattered remnant. And in our own day even an outsider can see how potent his influence still is. Are not the men of the *Lux Mundi* school—if one may be pardoned the phrase—almost all in a very real sense his spiritual children ? ¹ Perhaps it is no exaggeration to say that, during those long quiet years in his Somersetshire rectory, Church's was the greatest individual force, and that largely through his work as a Christian journalist, in directing the thought and determining the destiny of the Anglican Church.

2. It was, however, in the field of history and general literature that the Dean's most enduring work was accomplished. It was here, as his son-in-law, the late Bishop Paget, says, that his largest and most characteristic and most brilliant powers came to the front. " The study of human nature, in its variety, its strangeness, its complexity ; the analysis of broad movements into their component forces, or the tracing of them to their many causes ; the severance and appraising of good and bad in the mixed actions of famous men ; the redressing of unjust judgments ; the patient observation

¹ The essays in *Lux Mundi* contain more than a dozen direct references to Church.

and description of great courses of policy or action—these were tasks to which the Dean brought his very keenest interest, on which he spent his most serious and most concentrated work, in which he seemed to know no weariness.”¹ It is true he has given us no single large work. His various historical and literary studies are rather of the nature of a series of exquisitely cut cameos, of the finest workmanship. “I should like,” he once told his friend, Dr. Asa Gray, “to have done one good hard long piece of work. . . . The pleasure of finishing is with me mainly confined to finishing a longish sermon, or an article or essay, or small book.”² And the wish has sometimes found an echo in the regrets of some of his reviewers. It is more profitable, however, to appraise the treasures we possess than to mourn over those that we miss. And as soon as we set about an examination of the Dean’s work two things at once impress us : its wide range and its high quality. Look at the faces in his long portrait gallery : from St. Wulfstan to Wordsworth ; from the Early Ottomans to the leaders of the Oxford Movement ; Cassiodorus and Gregory the Great ; Anselm and Leo X ; Dante, Montaigne, and Pascal ; Hooker, Andrewes, and Butler ; Spenser and Bacon. He will expound

¹ Preface to *Life and Letters*, p. xiii.

² *Life and Letters*, p. 305,

to us, and always with the authority of one who knows, the Psalms of Israel, the Rig Veda of India, the *Divina Commedia*, the *Ecclesiastical Polity*, the *Novum Organon*, the *Faery Queen*, and the *Analogy of Religion*. He will guide us, with equal sureness of tread, through the intricacies of early mediæval history and the mazes of Browning's *Sordello*.

The quality of Church's work is no less remarkable than its range. On this point I prefer to let the experts speak. And it is very interesting to observe how one who himself hated all over-strained and exaggerated language provokes even the soberest critics to the use of the superlatives when they come to speak of him and his work. It is sixty years now since the Dean's essay on Dante was written, but in this field, Mr. R. H. Hutton declares, there is still no English scholar to compare with him. Of his essay on the Early Ottomans the same competent authority says it contains "one of the most remarkable indications of high historical imagination which the literature of the present day has produced." The volume on Bacon receives still higher praise : "The book," says Mr. Hutton, "is a perfect model of what such a book should be. . . . It is the most perfect and the most final summing-up of the verdict of posterity on a great man after counsel on both sides have been fully

heard, with which I am acquainted.”¹ When the companion volume on Spenser appeared the *Saturday Review* described it as “by far the most complete study we yet possess of the second founder of our poetry.” “The best of the many modern works on Anselm,” says Dr. H. B. Workman, “is that of Dean Church.”² His little volume, the *Beginning of the Middle Ages*, stands, in the judgment of Mr. D. C. Lathbury, “almost alone among books of its kind for its comprehensive grasp of a vast subject”³; while men like Gladstone, Morley, Hutton, and Dr. Sanday all unite in pronouncing his narrative of the Oxford Movement our most vivid and fascinating record of one of the most eventful chapters in modern history.⁴ “Dean Church,” said Lord Morley once to Mr. Stead, “is the consummate flower of the culture of the England that is passing away. We shall never look upon his like again.”⁵

3. Nor, in turning from the historian and man of letters to the preacher, is it necessary to drop into a lower key. The Oxford Movement, it is true, did not tend to magnify the preacher’s office.

¹ *Contemporary Thought and Thinkers*, vol. ii, pp. 244, 231. Cp. *Life of R. W. Dale*, p. 635.

² *Church of the West in the Middle Ages*, vol. i, p. 150.

³ *Leaders of the Church—Dean Church*, p. 170.

⁴ See Morley’s *Life of Gladstone*, vol. i, p. 163.

⁵ *Review of Reviews*, January 1891. Cp. Morley’s *Gladstone*, vol. ii, p. 177.

“The Sacraments, not preaching,” we are told, in the “advertisement” which is prefixed to the collected edition of the Oxford Tracts, “are the sources of Divine Grace.” The movement taught people, Church himself says, to think less of preaching than of the sacraments and services of the Church.¹ And yet, for all this, I will be bold to maintain that the best of Church’s sermons are among the greatest in the English language. Some ten volumes remain to represent his work in the pulpit.² Three of those are “Village Sermons” preached in the little church at Whatley. Their chief interest lies in showing how one of the most richly endowed minds of that generation could adapt itself to the lowly necessities of such a congregation, and especially in the fearlessness with which the preacher habitually dealt, and always in language of crystalline clearness, with the greatest themes of the Christian gospel. Church had no patience with the preaching which makes its home in the suburbs, but is a stranger to the citadel of New Testament teaching.³ The other

¹ *Oxford Movement*, p. 128.

² I include a little volume of Christmas Sermons, *The Message of Peace*, published by the S.P.C.K. Some of these, however, are to be found in the volumes published by Macmillan.

³ The first series of the *Village Sermons* contains the farewell sermon preached when the Dean left Whatley for London. It is a parting message which it seems almost sacrilege for any to read or hear, save those to whom it was directly spoken. In its

seven volumes consist of sermons (or lectures) delivered in St. Paul's, St. Mary's (Oxford), and elsewhere, on various occasions. The most precious of them to me—partly perhaps, because more than twenty years ago, it was my first introduction to Church—is the volume entitled *Human Life and Its Conditions*. It contains only seven sermons, but there is more than one of the seven the reading of which might well prove an epoch in a young man's intellectual and spiritual life. If it were given me to prepare a selection of, say, fifty of the greatest sermons of the nineteenth century, there are not less than four in that one small volume of Church's which I should not know how to leave out.

To some, doubtless, this will seem the language of wild and ridiculous excess. But if I err, at least I do so in good company, for the use of the superlative comes as naturally to the judges of Church's sermons as of his other writings. When his *Cathedral and University Sermons* were published, the editor of the *British Weekly*¹ spoke of them as the most magnificent sermons in the English language. Dr. Dale used to put them into the hands of his friends saying, "Read them—read simplicity, its tenderness, its pathos, it rivals, as Dr. Donaldson says, the famous Littlemore sermon by Newman on the Parting of Friends.

¹ *British Weekly*, February 9, 1893.

them over and over again, and you will see the kind of sermons I like.”¹ Of the little volume, *The Discipline of the Christian Character*, Bishop Gore writes that it seems to him the best existing answer to the question, In what does the inspiration of the Old Testament consist ?² And Canon Scott Holland remembers how he and his fellow students at Oxford used to note with surprise on Church’s occasional visits to St. Mary’s, “the many faces among the congregation of dons whom it was very rare to see at a University sermon.”³ It will be our business in a moment to learn what we can of the secret of this wonderful power ; meanwhile, let it be said that if a man would see how delicate insight, and spiritual passion, and the perfection of literary form, and, above all, a mind wholly mastered by the ruling ideas of the New Testament, may be yoked to the service of the Christian ministry, let him give himself to the study of the sermons of Dean Church.

III

From this hasty survey of Church’s writings we may pass on to note a few of the characteristics, both intellectual and spiritual, which they reveal.

1. “Let us pray the Holy Spirit of Truth,” he

¹ *Life*, p. 642.

² *Lux Mundi*, p. 345 (footnote). Cp. R. H. Hutton’s *Contemporary Thought and Thinkers*, vol. ii, p. 232.

³ *Life and Letters*, p. 206.

said once in an address to his brother clergymen, "to give us the single eye, the fearless heart, the dread of self-deceit, the love of what is real, the hatred and horror of what is showy and insincere." ¹ It is a prayer which was continually on the lips and in the hearts of the men of the Oxford Movement. They understood, as it has been given to few to understand, the austerity of the New Testament. With them self-repression was an instinct ; their minds were never far from the haunting fear of unreal words. And in all these things Dean Church shows himself a true child of the movement. One sees it on every page of his writings. What he so well says of Wordsworth is not less true of himself : " With his power and richness of imagination, and his full command over all the resources of voice and ear, an austere purity and plainness and nobleness marked all that he wrote, and formed a combination as distinct as it was uncommon." ² When a correspondent wrote to ask him concerning the secrets of good writing, his reply was that he did not recognize in himself any special training for style " except in watching against the temptation of *unreal* and of *fine* words." ³ One of his favourite quotations was Newman's

¹ *Cathedral and University Sermons*, p. 218.

² *Dante and other Essays*, p. 212.

³ *Life and Letters*, p. 325.

Prune thou thy words, the thoughts control
That o'er thee swell and throng ;
They will condense within thy soul,
And change to purpose strong.

And he never tires of warning men that there is a natural nemesis that waits upon all over-strong and exaggerated speech, that even what is true loses its weight at last through habits of idle and loose over-statement.¹ Literary critics are never weary of praising the winning beauty of Church's style ; but let it not be forgotten that it is the beauty which is born of truthfulness and simplicity, and of that sincerity of a man with himself as well as with his readers which is one of the first conditions of the highest literary excellence.

And the same stern self-repression, the same hatred and horror of what is showy and insincere, marked the whole man. It was with the utmost reluctance that he suffered himself to be torn from the seclusion of his Somersetshire rectory. Before he died he chose for his last resting-place a spot in the quiet country churchyard there, and with something like vehemence he charged his friends that no memorial of any kind should be placed to him in St. Paul's Cathedral.² Moreover, there is good reason to believe—though Church

¹ See especially a sermon on "Strong Words," *Pascal and other Sermons*, p. 255.

² *Life and Letters*, p. 220.

himself remained doggedly silent on the matter—that it was only his own resolute refusal even to consider the proposal that kept him out of the chair of St. Anselm.¹ What is, perhaps, most striking of all, he wrote in a volume of over four hundred pages the history of a movement in which he was himself a prominent actor, not only without once mentioning his own name, but, except in the preface and two footnotes, and on the last page, without ever using the first person singular! We may well ask if, outside that charmed circle of Oxford saints and scholars, Scotsman, Irishman, or Englishman ever performed a feat like that.²

2. A scarcely less conspicuous characteristic of Church's mind was his unfailing recognition of the limitations of our knowledge. It was due, in large measure, to his life-long study of Butler. "It is a great wish of mine," he wrote in his early days as a student at Oxford, "to be properly

¹ Morley in his *Life of Gladstone* (vol. iii, p. 96) says bluntly there is no truth in the story. But the letter which he quotes certainly does not disprove it, and, on the contrary, the statements of Church's intimate friends, Lord Blachford (*Letters*, p. 417) and Canon Scott Holland (Church's *Life and Letters*, p. 229), seem to put the matter beyond all reasonable doubt. It is worthy of note that Gladstone had been very disappointed that Church did not succeed Stanley in 1863 in the Chair of Ecclesiastical History at Oxford (*Life*, vol. ii, p. 430), and that in 1869 he had himself offered him a vacant Canonry at Worcester (*Life and Letters*, p. 180).

² *Critical Review*, vol. i, p. 237.

acquainted with Butler, to lay the foundations of my own mind amid his works—to have him ever facing me and imbuing me with his spirit.”¹ And henceforth Butler ranks with Dante and Pascal and Newman as one of the chief influences by which his mind was moulded. All his thinking is “instinct with the awful consciousness of our immense and hopeless ignorance of the ways and counsels of God.” It filled him with wonder, tinged sometimes with something like scorn, to hear men arguing “as if the whole of the invisible world was as easy to be understood as the theory of the steam-engine.” He listened once to a sermon on the dread subject of future punishment. The sermon was forcible enough in its Scripture proofs, but, he says, it simply worried and almost exasperated him, “because it assumed all through that we knew the exact definite purport of the Scripture terms used, and that they were used with exact correspondence with our own on the same subject.” “My own feeling about the whole subject,” he said, “is that the wisest thing men can

¹ *Life and Letters*, p. 17. There is a curious parallel at several points between the lives of these two great Churchmen. Butler was a student, and Church a Fellow, of Oriel College, Oxford. Each was long buried in retirement, the one at Stanhope, the other at Whatley. Each was Dean of St. Paul's. Each was offered and refused the Primacy, and in each there was the same high seriousness, the same noble austerity, the same touch of unearthliness.

do is to cultivate diligently a sense of their own hopeless ignorance, and to have the courage to say 'I cannot tell!' " ¹ And so, too, in regard to the equally mysterious problem of pain: "Why pain at all? I can only say that the very attempt to give an answer, that the very thought of an answer *by us* being conceivable, seems to me one which a reasonable being, in our circumstances, ought not to entertain. It seems to me one of those questions which can only be expressed by such a figure as a fly trying to get through a glass window, or a human being jumping into space; that is, it is almost impossible to express the futility of it." "Of course," he added, "this is only Butler again; it is only vagueness and platitude. Every one knows it. But not only I cannot get beyond it, but I cannot imagine any one doing so." "Without being a sceptic or an agnostic, one may feel that there are questions in the world which never will be answered on this side of the grave, perhaps not on the other. It was the saying of an old Greek in the very dawn of thought, that men would meet with many surprises when they were dead. Perhaps one will be the recollection that, when we were here, we thought the ways of Almighty God so easy to argue about." ²

¹ *Life and Letters*, pp. 266-7.

² *Ibid.*, pp. 275, 338.

No words could more truly reveal one aspect of Church's mind. Light has indeed come into the world, and Church saw it and rejoiced in it, but he never forgot what some men will not remember, the deep and impenetrable shadows by which it is girdled.

3. Another marked quality of the Dean's mind was his judicial temper. His judgments were by no means always lenient ; but, lenient or severe, they were (with one important exception, to which reference will be made in a moment), the judgments of one who had heard counsel on both sides, and had honestly sought to put himself in possession of all the facts upon which a judgment should be based. There is perhaps no better illustration of this judicial temper than is to be found in his great sermon entitled " Sin and Judgment." ¹ At the close of the sermon he adds a note saying that the sermon was written before the writer had seen Dr. Farrar's sermon on the same text.² There is something almost cruel in the suggested comparison. No contrast could well be greater than that between the calm and solemn pages of Church and the fevered rhetoric of Farrar. Farrar withers us with a tempest of words. He is like some shrill barrister bent on securing a verdict ; he does not care a fig

¹ *Human Life and its Conditions*, pp. 97-124.

² In his *Eternal Hope*.

for the other side of the case ; he will scarcely admit even that there is another side. Church is the judge on the bench who knows that there are two sides, and who is resolute that both sides shall be fully heard. It was this fixed habit of looking all round things that led him to question some of an Englishman's most confident judgments concerning the past. Was the Papal Supremacy, *e.g.*, always and only the evil thing which the average Protestant still perhaps believes it to have been ? Church was too thorough a student of history to shut his eyes to the wickedness and vileness which have from time to time gathered around the Roman See, and which are, he truly says, "one of the most revolting profanations recorded in the history of the world."¹ And yet, on the other hand—this is the kind of question he would have us put to ourselves—where, in those rough, wild days, when might was right, and the long battle between law and tyranny had scarce begun, where could men look if not to the Church, with its authority concentrated and represented in the Pope ?² And so, too, in regard to monasticism. What "monkery" had become in the days of Luther we all know, and Europe's protest in the sixteenth century needs no apology. But again, Church would

¹ *Beginning of the Middle Ages*, p. 188.

² See *St. Anselm*, pp. 266, 339.

remind us, there is another side to the picture. What drunkenness is to this generation, licentiousness was to the society of the Roman Empire ; and an age which gives its benediction to the mild asceticism of the Temperance movement should have something besides curses for the efforts of an earlier age to stem the fierce torrent of impurity.¹

We see the same large-mindedness in the Dean's attitude towards the controversies of his own day. He rebuked with equal sternness the raw haste of the revolutionary who is ready to inaugurate a new intellectual era between sunrise and sunset, and the unthinking, foolish fear that sees a bogey in every unfamiliar truth. Thus, *e.g.*, when some were losing their heads over the publication of the *Vestiges of Creation* and the *Origin of Species*, Church told them bluntly they were acting "more like old ladies than philosophers."² When, again, in 1860, *Essays and Reviews* threw the whole ecclesiastical world into a ferment, he condemned the book as a reckless book ; "several of the writers," he said, "have not got their thoughts and theories into such order and consistency as to warrant their coming before the world with

¹ See Mr. Stead's report of a conversation with the Dean on this subject, *Review of Reviews*, January 1891.

² *Life and Letters*, p. 154.

such revolutionary views.” “But,” he went on, “there has been a great deal of unwise panic, and unjust and hasty abuse, and people who have not an inkling of the difficulties which beset the questions, are for settling them in a summary way, which is perilous for every one.”¹ And, again, thirty years later, when the writers of *Lux Mundi* raised the whole problem of Biblical Criticism, Church, while deploring that the subject had been so often dealt with by “a cruel and insolent curiosity, utterly reckless of results and even enjoying the pleasure of affronting religion and religious faith,” nevertheless insisted “that the time had come for a more resolute facing and handling of the questions, what the Bible really is, and how it came to be.”²

Again, it was this largeness of outlook, joined with his native seriousness of temperament, which made Church so alive to the greatness of the issues at stake in the conflict between faith and unbelief, and so impatient of the flippancy of some of the combatants. Towards ignorance and doubt seeking for some one to guide them he was all patience and sympathy; but when men talked as if the claims of Christianity could be disposed of between the courses of dinner, or in the pages of a magazine

¹ *Life and Letters*, p. 157.

² *Ibid.*, p. 342.

article—"sapping a solemn creed with solemn sneer"—his scorn broke through all bonds. "Suspect what has the mark of insolence," he would say—a word, his son-in-law tells us, that came from his lips with a peculiar ring and emphasis—"suspect what has the mark of insolence wherever you see it, as much as if it had the mark of untruth, or insincerity, or haste, or passion." "If," he said, "the opponents of Christianity are right, if the victory lies with them, it is much more than that Christians are mistaken, as men have been mistaken, and have corrected in time their mistakes about science, about principles of government, about the policy or economy of a state. It means that now as regards religion, as widely as men are living and acting, all that is now is false, rotten, wrong. Our present hopes are utterly extinguished. Our present motives are as unsubstantial as bubbles on water. We are living in a dream. We are wasting on an idol the best love, the highest affections, the purest tenderness which can dwell in human hearts." Of course, he went on, "consequences are nothing to the logic of an argument. Consequences cannot alter the laws and facts of the universe. But consequences bring home to us a quicker sense of the reality of what we are talking about. They are a bridle on idle and empty words." Therefore, if we are to lose Christianity, let us at

least be alive to what we are doing ; “ and if we are to lose it—to lose Him whom the modern world has hitherto looked to for its ideal and leaned on for its support, if the new world before us is to be one without the Cross, or God, or immortality, let us know what we are about ; let us have the seriousness which befits the surrender of such a hope, the seriousness with which a vanquished state surrenders territory or independence to the necessities of defeat, with which in the old strife of parties a beaten statesman surrendered his life and fate to the law.” ¹

4. Enough, I think, has been said in this paper to show, even to those who are least familiar with Church’s writings, the range of his intellectual interests and his power to appreciate varying forms of intellectual greatness. But no man was ever further from that worst treason against the soul which blurs the distinction between the greatness of intellect and the greatness of goodness. “ The greatness of doing right, the greatness of a good life, the greatness of duty and conscience, the greatness of wishing to be good ”—all this belongs to a different order of greatness from the greatness of the intellect. “ St. Paul was as great in his own order as Newton was in his ; and that which

¹ From a sermon on Responsibility for our Belief (*Human Life and its Conditions*, pp. 64–96).

made St. Paul great was as far and as distinct from that which made Newton great, as Newton's greatness was apart from, and perhaps incomprehensible to, the mighty and rich of this world." "And though, in our judgment of persons, we shall do wisely to exercise to the full the charities due from our own half-knowledge and imperfection, there cannot be a greater heresy against reason and the sacred faith in righteousness than to think that the greater gifts carry with them diminished responsibilities and larger licence, that a life that otherwise would be at once condemned may be forgiven for the splendour which surrounds its vices." It is in the sermon from which these sentences are taken—"The Supremacy of Goodness"¹—that this great conviction finds its noblest expression, but it shines with a fixed and steady light through all the Dean's writings. He notes, as the dominant character of the preaching of Newman, its "passionate and sustained earnestness after a high moral rule, seriously realized in conduct."² To his loved Dante he can accord no higher praise than this, that "no one who could understand and do homage to greatness in man, ever drew the line so strongly between greatness and goodness, and so unhesitatingly placed the

¹ *Human Life and its Conditions*, pp. 1-30.

² *Oxford Movement*, p. 21.

hero of this world only—placed him in all his magnificence, honoured with no timid or dissembling reverence—at the distance of worlds below the place of the lowest saint.”¹ Perhaps nothing that he ever wrote tried him so severely as his little book on Bacon. His letters show how he shrank from telling what he took to be the plain truth concerning Bacon’s character.² But the task was accepted and the lines never swerve. It is no grudging tribute which Church pays to Bacon’s greatness: “It is difficult,” he says, “to imagine a grander and more magnificent career; and his name ranks among the few chosen examples of human achievement. And yet,” he goes on, “it was not only an unhappy life; it was a poor life. . . . Bacon chose to please men, and not to follow what his soul must have told him was the better way. He wanted, in his dealings with men, that sincerity on which he insisted so strongly in his dealings with nature and knowledge. And the ruin of a great life was the consequence.”³

And the goodness which Church thus crowned and set apart was no vague and shadowy excellence. It had its pattern and standard in the life and mind and self-sacrificing goodness of the

¹ *Dante*, p. 189.

² *Life and Letters*, p. 308.

³ *Bacon*, pp. 2, 4.

Son of God. “The world,” he said in a sermon preached only three years before his death—and the words are the more memorable because they read like one of the speaker’s rare self-disclosures—“the world in which we now pass our days is full of great powers. Nature is great in its bounty, in its sternness, in its unbroken uniformity ; literature and art are great in what they have created for us ; beauty is great in its infinite expressions ; but these are not the powers for man—man, the responsible man, the sinner and the penitent, who may be the saint—to fall down and worship. They are to pass with the world in which we have known them, the world of which they are part ; but man remains, remains what he is in soul and character and affections. *They*, at least, feel this who are drawing near to the unseen and unknown beyond ; they to whom, it may be, these great gifts of God, the spell and wonder of art and literature, the glory and sweet tenderness of nature, have been the brightness and joy of days that are now fast ending : *they* feel that there is yet an utter want of what these things cannot give ; that soul and heart want something yet deeper, something more lovely, something more divine—that which will realize man’s ideals, that which will complete and fulfil his incompleteness and his helplessness—yes, the real likeness in thought

and will and character, to the goodness of Jesus Christ.”¹

“*The real likeness in thought and will and character to the goodness of Jesus Christ*”: this was the ideal which Church kept steadily before him in all he wrote and in all he was. It is a high claim, but those who knew him best are the first to make it. Even men who had no sympathy with his religious school could not come near him without doing homage to the unworldliness and elevation of his character. Mark Pattison, who splashed so many reputations with his acid, has nothing but admiration for Church. When in his *Memoirs* he recalls the election of the young Wadham student to be Fellow of Oriel, he quotes the saying of another, “There was such a moral beauty about Church that they could not help taking him.”² Lord Morley, too, who seems to kindle at every mention of the name of Church, writes of him as “a man who united in so wonderful a degree the best gifts that come of culture, sound and just sense, and sustained purity of spirit.”³ And in this again Church proves himself heir to the best traditions of the Oxford Movement. The leaders of that movement, however we may judge them

¹ *Cathedral and University Sermons*, p. 166.

² Page 163.

³ *Life of Gladstone*, vol. ii, p. 177.

in other matters, were men to whom religion really meant "the most awful and the most seriously personal thing on earth." Unseen things were to them the things that really are ; the real world was the spiritual world. Newman preached about that world, Church said, "so that he made you feel without doubt that it was the most real of worlds to him ; he made you feel in time, in spite of yourself, that it was a real world with which you too had concern." ¹ So it was with Church ; he lived, he spoke, he wrote, as seeing Him who is invisible. Surely the day must come, he said once, "when even our most serious controversies, even our great and apparently hopeless controversy with Rome, may be carried on as if in the presence and under the full knowledge and judgment of the Lord of truth and charity." ² This was the deep undertone of his whole life. The divine judgment, in which we all profess to believe, was with him an ever-present fact. "It was," said one who was very near to him, "as though he lived in constant recollection of something that was awful and was dreadful to him ; something that bore with searching force on all men's ways and purposes and hopes and fears ; something before which he knew himself to be, as it were,

¹ *Occasional Papers*, vol. ii, p. 445.

² *Life and Letters*, p. 301.

continually arraigned.”¹ “I often have,” Church wrote to the same friend not long before his death, “a kind of waking dream ; up one road, the image of a man decked and adorned as if for a triumph, carried up by rejoicing and exulting friends, who praise his goodness and achievements ; and, on the other road, turned back to back to it, there is the very man himself in sordid and squalid apparel, surrounded not by friends, but by ministers of justice, and going on, while his friends are exulting, to his certain and perhaps awful judgment.”

It is a sublime figure, not unworthy, as Morley says, of the Dante whom its author so much loved and so well understood ; and it lets us farther, perhaps, than any other single saying into the inmost secret of this great and good man’s life.

IV

It is time now to bring this long eulogy to a close, and in doing so to indicate one point at which, for the present writer at least, the language of appreciation which has hitherto been employed becomes impossible. I shall not dwell upon it, but I should be false to one of the chief lessons of Church’s own life were I to pass it over in silence.

¹ *Life and Letters*, p. xxii.

² *Ibid.*, p. xxiv.

The general attitude of the leaders of the Oxford Movement towards their fellow Christians of the other Protestant Churches in England is matter of common knowledge. If one cared more to score a point in debate than to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace, it would be very easy to disinter from the literature of the period examples of the worst kind of ecclesiastical narrowness. But these things are better left in their proper oblivion. What has to be said is that Dean Church, with all his genuine catholicity of spirit, represents the littleness as well as the greatness of the movement to which he belonged. His biography reveals, it is true, how sincere could be his attachment to those who were not of his own Church, and how unaffected his admiration of their work. It is true, too, as Mr. Hutton points out,¹ that there was a "Puseyite" form of narrowness of which Church was never in danger. But, unhappily, this is not the whole story. He cannot, of course, any more than the rest of his friends, get his tongue round the word "Church" when he is referring to those of us who are not Anglicans ; we are "other bodies which claim to be Churches and to represent the message of God."² It is curious to note, by the way, that the measure

¹ *Contemporary Thought and Thinkers*, vol. ii, p. 244.

² *Occasional Papers*, vol. ii, p. 397.

which in this matter he metes out to us is measured to him again by his old friend Cardinal Newman.¹ All this, however, regrettable as it is, is only what we have grown accustomed to at the hands of the modern High Churchman. What one did look for in a man of Church's cosmopolitan culture is a more generous recognition of worth and work which do not bear the Anglican stamp. Let one illustration suffice. Every Biblical student to-day freely acknowledges the debt of all the Churches to the splendid pioneer work done by the Christian scholars of Scotland in the field of Historical Criticism. Yet there might be no Christianity north of the Tweed for all the recognition it gets in the pages of Dean Church. Still more lamentable are his judgments on some of the heroes of Nonconformity. Like most of his school, he is much more cordial in his blame than his praise of the Reformers, English or Continental. This is how he writes of Calvin: "Dogmatist, persecutor, tyrant, the proud and relentless fanatic, who more than any one consecrated harsh narrowness in religion by cruel theories about God."² Barrowe, one of the early martyrs of Congregationalism, he dismisses as an "obscure sectary."³ And even

¹ *Occasional Papers*, vol. ii, p. 403.

² *Ibid.*, vol. ii, p. 359.

³ *Pascal and other Sermons*, p. 54.

of Cromwell himself—and this time he fairly takes our breath away—he declares that “the great Puritan chieftain passed away like a dream, and left not a trace of himself in the character and serious thought of England.”¹

All this is very perplexing, and it is not easy to find a place for it in our estimate of a man of Church’s intellectual and spiritual build. Does it mean that even his judgment had been warped in the fierce fires of ecclesiastical antipathy? Why can he not see—so the Nonconformist reader asks himself again and again as he turns the pages of the *Oxford Movement*—that the arguments by which he as an Anglican would make good his defence against the Roman Catholic are the very arguments with which the mouth of the Nonconformist is filled in his controversy with the Anglican? “They who had received their Christianity,” Church writes, “at the hands of the English Church had duties towards it from which neither dissatisfaction nor the idea of something better could absolve them.”² Exactly: and that, too, is our contention. Again, he says: “Rome has not such a clean record of history, it has not such a clean account of what is done and permitted in its dominions under an authority supposed to be

¹ *Occasional Papers*, vol. i, p. 34.

² *Oxford Movement*, p. 239.

irresistible, that it can claim to be the one pure and perfect Church, entitled to judge and correct and govern all other Churches. And if the claim is made, there is no help for it, we must not shrink from the task of giving the answer.”¹ For “Rome” substitute “Church of England” and again you have the answer of the English Non-conformist. Once more, Church tells us what it was that rallied Newman’s friends to the English Church, after the shock of his secession: “It was,” he says, “the resolute and serious appeal from brilliant logic, and stern sarcasm, and pathetic and impressive eloquence, to reality and experience, as well as to history, as to the position and substantial characteristics of the traditional and actually existing English Church, shown not on paper, but in work, and in spite of contradictory experiences and inconsistent elements.”² And once more, I ask, is not reasoning of this kind as valid on the lips of a Presbyterian or Methodist as of an Anglican? We, the children of Knox and of Wesley, can we not point to “reality and experience” as well as Dean Church? Have our Churches no “positive and substantial characteristics shown not on paper but in work”? And

¹ *Oxford Movement*, p. 260.

² *Ibid.*, p. 401. My quotation is correct, but the sentence obviously needs a little reshaping.

God, who knoweth the hearts, hath He not borne us witness, giving us the Holy Spirit, even as He did unto others, and hath put no difference between us and them ?

And yet, though it would have been something like treason to oneself to have left this word of protest unspoken, I end as I began, with the word of gratitude and honour. I gladly confess myself one of those who have seen in Richard William Church—so at least they believe—at once the most cultured and the most completely Christian mind of his generation. And if there are any to whom, on the lips of a Methodist, this seems a hard saying, I am content to justify myself as Church justified his own devotion to Newman : there are in the Christian Church—thank God, there are—bonds of affinity, subtler, more real and more prevailing than even the fatal legacies of the great schisms, and the sympathies which unite the saints of Anglicanism with the disciples of Wesley are as strong and natural as the barriers which outwardly keep them asunder are to human eyes hopelessly insurmountable.

VIII

LORD MORLEY AND THE CHRISTIAN
FAITH

VIII

LORD MORLEY AND THE CHRISTIAN FAITH

WHAT does Lord Morley think about Christianity ? That, it may be said, is a question which concerns no one except Lord Morley. And in a sense this is true. Certainly I do not approach the subject from the point of view of one who seeks to underpin a tottering faith with the reluctant admissions of its assailants. There was a time when good men thought that a man could somehow be made more sure of Christ and of His supremacy in the spiritual realm by putting into his hands a kind of certificate of character signed by John Stuart Mill and half a dozen others of the great and wise. One would hope that Christian apologists have got past that littleness now. Nevertheless, when we are thinking of one who stands in the front rank both of English statesmen and English men of letters, who has behind him a life which has been one long triumph of sincerity and high principle, who owes little to the popularity of his opinions, and much to the

sheer force of his character—it is now many years since Lord Morley was known among the miners of Northumberland as “honest John”—then it does become a question of more than ordinary interest how such a man conceives his obligations and defines his relations to the faith which is so potent a factor in the life of the community in which he himself is so far-shining a figure.

I

“No writer of our day,” said a distinguished English preacher, writing in 1886, “is more intensely bitter or more glaringly unjust in his treatment of the Christian faith than Mr. John Morley.”¹ And twenty-five or thirty years ago, perhaps, the majority of the writer’s English fellow-Christians would have endorsed the verdict. Men who knew nothing else about Morley, and who had never read so much as a dozen pages of his writings, knew that he once spelled the name God with a little “g” and judged accordingly. Moreover, there was enough in what Lord Morley had then written to lend some justification to Dr. Watkinson’s severe judgment. It may be well to recall some of his more explicit and outspoken declarations. But first let me enumerate the works from

¹ W. L. Watkinson’s Fernley Lecture, *The Influence of Scepticism on Character*, p. 40,

some of which my quotations are taken. To begin with, there are the five volumes which treat of the famous French thinkers who laid the train for the great Revolution—Voltaire, Rousseau, and Diderot. Then come four volumes—or, if we include with them, as we well may, the *Studies in Literature*, five volumes—of critical *Miscellanies*, *Compromise*, *Burke* (in the “English Men of Letters” series), *Walpole* (one of “Twelve English Statesmen”), *Oliver Cromwell*, and, finally, the more elaborate Lives of Cobden and Gladstone.

Now for the quotations by which, a quarter of a century ago, popular opinion in the matter of Morley's religious attitude was wont to justify itself. He speaks of himself as one of those who have made up their minds to face the worst and to shape as best they can “a life in which the cardinal verities of the common creed shall have no place.”¹ “The old gods” of faith which “before the era of their petrification” were “full of vitality and light,” are now, he says, “frigid and unlovely blocks.”² “If,” said Rousseau, when Madame de Warens died, “if I thought that I should not see her in the other life my poor imagination would shrink from the idea of a perfect bliss which I would fain promise myself in it.” And now here

¹ *Compromise*, p. 156.

² *Miscellanies*, vol. i, p. 206.

is Morley's comment : " To pluck so gracious a flower of hope on the edge of the sombre, unechoing gulf of nothingness into which our friend has slid silently down, is a natural impulse of the sensitive soul, numbing remorse and giving a moment's relief to the hunger and thirst of a tenderness that has been robbed of its object. Yet would not men be more likely to have a deeper love for those about them, and a keener dread of filling a house with aching hearts, if they courageously realized from the beginning of their days that we have none of this perfect companionable bliss to promise ourselves in other worlds, that the black and horrible grave is indeed the end of our communion, and that we know one another no more ? " ¹ The deism of Rousseau Morley regarded as a " religious reaction " corresponding to that which took place in England under Wesley and the Evangelical Revival. But he comforts his readers with the reflection that if it was a far less powerful it was also a far less retrogressive movement, and that " it kept fewer of those dogmas which gradual change of intellectual climate had reduced to the condition of rank superstitions. " ² He speaks with

¹ *Rousseau*, vol. i, p. 219. Of Chaumette Morley writes : " He showed the natural effect of abandoning belief in another life by his energetic interest in arrangements for improving the lot of man in this life " (*Miscellanies*, vol. i, p. 78).

² *Rousseau*, vol. ii, p. 258.

emphasis of what he thinks the peril “of having morality made an appendage of a set of theological mysteries, because the mysteries are sure in time to be dragged into the open-air of reason,” and then “moral truth crumbles away with the false dogmas with which it had got mixed ¹”; and he does not hesitate to declare that the “more or less rapidly accelerated destruction” of “theological ways of regarding life and prescribing right conduct is the first condition of the further elevation of humanity as well in power of understanding as in morals and spirituality.” ² “Those who agree with the present writer,” he says again—and this is perhaps the most emphatic and decisive passage that can be quoted—“are not sceptics. They positively, absolutely, and without reserve reject as false the whole system of objective propositions which make up the popular belief of the day, in one and all of its theological expressions.” ³ He does, indeed, admit that “the religious sentiment has conferred enormous benefits on civilization,” and looks forward to the time when religion will be again, what it has been in the past, the “supreme, penetrating, controlling, decisive part of a man’s life.” ⁴ But the religion of the future, though it will be indebted to Christianity, will not be Chris-

¹ *Voltaire*, p. 150.

² *Miscellanies*, vol. ii, p. 259.

³ *Compromise*, p. 160.

⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 76, 36.

tianity. Christianity is “the last great religious synthesis, the one nearest to us”; but we are still awaiting “the advent of the St. Paul of the humanitarian faith of the future,” who will incorporate Christianity “in some wider gospel of Justice and Progress”—“some replacing faith which shall retain all the elements of moral beauty that once gave light to the old belief that has disappeared, and must still possess a living force in the new.”¹ And if we ask, Faith in what? faith in whom? the answer is that the faith of the future will concern itself “less with unseen divinities than with the long brotherhood of humanity seen and unseen.”²

II

Words like these might well seem to be final; if there were no more to be said they would be final, and Dr. Watkinson’s judgment might pass without challenge. But this is not all. There are other facts which call, I will not say for a reversal, but at least for a revision of this too hasty finding.

In passing, it may not be out of place to recall that Lord Morley’s mother was a Methodist, and that he can remember—so it is said—being taken

¹ *Compromise*, pp. 153, 156; *Rousseau*, vol. ii, p. 258.

² *Rousseau*, vol. ii, p. 277.

by her as a child to a Methodist chapel to hear Robert Newton preach. By an interesting coincidence he occupied in Lincoln College, Oxford, the rooms that had once been John Wesley's. At one time, it appears, he was intending to take orders in the Anglican Church, and, most surprising of all, one of the first bits of literary work on which he was engaged was the *Lives of the Archbishops of Canterbury*, afterwards taken over and completed by Dean Hook.¹ But let us look again at the writings to which attention has already been drawn, and we shall see at once how inadequately the foregoing quotations represent the whole mind of their author.

In the first place, we are always conscious in Morley's references to religion of his sense of the seriousness and magnitude of the issues at stake. He is no light-minded trifler, "sapping a solemn creed with solemn sneer." There is a certain high seriousness, a certain sombre nobleness, even in his denials. The elegant dabbler in infidelity, for whom the great controversy is not a grim battle, but only a glittering tournament; the agnostic who has "his day with the fine ladies like the black foot-boy of other times, or the spirit-rapper and table-turner of our own"²—all this moves him to

¹ See *The Bookman*, vol. i, p. 99.

² *Studies in Literature*, p. 341.

a wholesome scorn. Moreover, Morley never allows himself, like Voltaire, to be blinded to the historical greatness of the Christian faith, and the part which it has played in human affairs. "The two things best worth attending to in history," he says, are "not party intrigues nor battles nor dynastic affairs, nor even many Acts of Parliament, but the great movement of the economic forces of a society on the one hand and on the other the forms of religious opinion and ecclesiastical organization."¹ And so he can recognize the worth of things as far apart as the monotheism of the Old Testament and the evangelicalism of John Wesley. In the one he sees "the germ of much that is purest and loftiest and most inspiring among the ideals of Western civilization"²; in the other he recognizes the base of many of the powerful characters of the nineteenth century, from John Henry Newman downwards.³ He admits, too, that Christianity was the only force by which the regeneration of Europe could have been effected after the decline of the Roman civilization.⁴ More than once he stands forward as the champion of the Church of the Middle Ages, against which so much ignorant abuse has been directed. "Amid many imperfections and some crimes," he declares, "it did a

¹ *Miscellanies*, vol. iii, p. 9.

² *Voltaire*, p. 320.

³ *Miscellanies*, vol. iii, p. 118.

⁴ *Ibid.*, vol. ii, p. 313.

work that no glory of physical science can equal, and no instrument of physical science can compass, in purifying men's appetites, in setting discipline and direction on their lives, and in offering to humanity new types of moral obligation and fairer ideals of saintly perfection, whose light still shines like a star to guide our own poor voyages." ¹

"We get very wearied," he says—and the sentence is a deserved rebuke alike to the Voltairean iconoclast and the Protestant bigot who can see in the long centuries between Augustine and Luther nothing but quackery and vileness—"we get very wearied of the persistent identification of the Church throughout the dark ages with fraud and imposture and sinister self-seeking, when we have once learnt, what is undoubtedly the most important principle in the study of those times, that it was the churchmen who kept the flickering light of civilization alive amid the raging storms of uncontrolled passion and violence." ²

Further, it is evident that, whether consciously or not, Morley has been profoundly influenced by the teaching and ethical ideals of Christianity.

¹ *Miscellanies*, vol. iii, p. 13.

² *Voltaire*, p. 323. Similarly, Morley records in Turgot's praise that "he never forgot that it is as wise and just to confess the obligations of mankind to the Catholic monotheism of the West as it is shallow and unjust in professors of Christianity to despise or hate the lower theological systems which guide the humbler families of mankind" (*Miscellanies*, vol. ii, p. 95).

The influence reveals itself in various ways. It is seen in his striking familiarity with the English Bible, which he once spoke of as "a noble and most majestic monument of literature"¹; in some of his writings Scripture phrases shine and sparkle on almost every page. It is seen in the intensity of his social and humanitarian sympathies. "There never was a time," he has said, "there never was an age when, from the highest to the lowest, there was more common human-heartedness, more earnest desire to alleviate the lot of those who have to perform the hard services of the world and face its gusty insecurities; and never a time when people were more willing to make personal sacrifices. I know people who hate their own luxury; and if anybody, any statesman, would tell them how, by stripping themselves of this or that luxury, they would lighten the lot of those whose lot is hard, they would do it." It is the man himself that speaks in words like these. Through all his long life Morley has never forgotten "the masses of men, those who dwell in dens, and whose lives are bitter." "I count that day basely spent," he cried once, "in which no thought is given to the life of the garret and the hovel." It was this that drew him so strongly to Voltaire: not the great Frenchman's "reckless speculative

¹ *Compromise*, p. 192.

intelligence," but rather his "righteous social protest against a system socially pestilent" ¹; just as it was the lack of this that led him to rebuke even his great master, Edmund Burke. Why, he asks, why could not Burke see that that for which men cried in the days of the French Revolution was no idle abstraction, no metaphysical right of man, "but only the practical right of being permitted by their own toil to save themselves and the little ones about their knees from hunger and cruel death" ? ² And, let me add, it is the depth and tenderness of his social sympathies, so quick to feel the pain "in widest commonalty spread," that has given edge and passion to Morley's honourable and lifelong protest against the wickedness and insanity of war.

But it is, perhaps, in his insistence on the supremacy of the ethical and spiritual that we see most clearly the commanding influence of Morley's Christian environment. One or two of his recorded judgments will best illustrate what is meant. Thus he makes it a ground of complaint against Emerson that he has so little to say of "that horrid burden and impediment on the soul which the churches call Sin, and which, by whatever name we call it, is a very real catastrophe in the

¹ *Voltaire*, p. 217.

² *Burke*, "English Men of Letters" series, p. 161.

moral nature of man.”¹ Those moods of holiness, awe, reverence, and silent worship of an Unseen not made with hands, which the Christianizing Jews first brought from the East are, he says, “among the richest acquisitions of human nature.”² When Dr. Draper lays it down as a fundamental axiom of history that human progress depends upon increase of our knowledge of the conditions of material phenomena, this is Morley’s comment: “As if moral advance, the progressive elevation of types of character and ethical ideals were not at least an equally important cause of improvement in civilization. *The type of Saint Vincent de Paul is plainly as indispensable to progress as the type of Newton.*”³ And in his Romanes Lecture on Machiavelli he starts the “ingenious and idle speculation”—it is easy to see what his own answer would be—“whether, if the influence of Florence on European culture had never existed, the loss to mankind would have been as deep as if the little republic of Geneva had been wiped out by the Dukes of Savoy.”⁴

The same bent of soul is revealed in Morley’s choice of his spiritual masters. Ignorant and prejudiced people speak sometimes as if his thinking

¹ *Miscellanies*, vol. i, p. 344.

² *Rousseau*, vol. ii, p. 259.

³ *Miscellanies*, vol. iii, p. 15. (*Italics mine.*)

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 48.

had been fashioned solely on certain French models of a type peculiarly distasteful to English minds. A mere glance at his collected works should be sufficient to dispel this delusion, even if we had not his own distinct and emphatic disclaimer. "Men," he says, "who sympathize with him [Voltaire] in his aims, and even for their sake forgive him his method, who have long ago struck the tents under which they once found shelter in the lands of belief, to whom Catholicism has become as extinct a thing as Mahometanism, even they will turn with better chance of edification to the great masters and teachers of the old faith, than to the fiery precursor of the new."¹ Every one knows his profound admiration for the writings of John Henry Newman and Dean Church. It may be of interest, too, to mention that during one of Gladstone's political campaigns in Midlothian he told his host one morning at breakfast that he had just received from John Morley a little volume sent to him because of the delight and profit it had yielded to Morley himself. It was John Woolman's *Journal*. Those who have turned over the quiet pages of the pious Quaker will not need to be told that one who could find strength and refreshment there has little in common with the hardy blasphemer

¹ *Voltaire*, p. 273.

whom, twenty-five years ago, men thought they saw in the biographer of Voltaire, Diderot, and Rousseau.

It has been alleged ¹ that there is one grave exception to all this, that in one matter at least Morley falls far short of the Christian ideal—the crucial problem of the relation of the sexes. There is no need to repeat the incriminating passages, but it may be said at once that Morley's warmest admirers must have wished that his language had been less apologetic in his discussion, for example, of the life of George Eliot, and especially in his references to the nauseous amours of some of the revolutionary French thinkers. On the other hand, it would be grossly unjust to associate Morley with those who, with a light heart, are ready to set at nought the Christian law of purity. He knows what has been won, and how hardly, and that to surrender it would be to slip back again into the morass of moral beastliness. In his essay on Robespierre he speaks of "that indiscretion of the young appetite, about which the world is mute, but whose better ordering and governance would give a diviner brightness to the earth." ² "Looseness of opinion as to the family and the conditions

¹ See, for example, an article in the *British Weekly*, May 14, 1891, entitled, "The Parable of Mr. Morley and his Gig," and Dr. W. T. Davison's *Christian Interpretation of Life*, p. 258.

² *Miscellanies*, vol. i, p. 7.

of its well-being and stability was," he frankly says, "a flaw that ran through the whole period of revolutionary thought"—"perhaps the worst blemish upon the feeling and intelligence of the revolutionary schools."¹ "Is not," he asks, "every incentive and every concession to vagrant appetite a force that enwraps a man in gratification of self, and severs him from duty to others, and so a force of dissolution and dispersion? It might be necessary to pull down the Church, but the worst Church that has ever prostituted the name and the idea of religion cannot be so disastrous to society as a gospel that systematically relaxes self-control as being an unmeaning curtailment of happiness."² This is not the air of the swamp, but of the heights—of the heights, be it said, on which, so far as the world may judge, Morley's whole life has been passed.

III

In addition to the facts thus gathered from Morley's own writings, there are two further considerations which must not be lost sight of in any attempt to determine his attitude towards the Christian faith.

In the first place, there can be little doubt, I

¹ *Miscellanies*, vol. ii, pp. 71, 49.

² *Voltaire*, p. 151.

think, that his long absorption in the writings of the French revolutionary thinkers of the eighteenth century led him, more than he himself realized, to identify Christianity with the monstrous caricature which was presented by the French Catholicism of the period. Again and again, in reading his pages, we watch the polished shafts of scorn fall harmless to the ground, except as against a form of Christianity with which most modern Protestants can have as little sympathy as Morley himself.

Further, it is necessary to keep in mind the period in the history of English thought to which Morley's writings belong. He entered Oxford as a student in 1856, when the star of Newman had set and the star of Mill had risen, and when the reaction from Tractarianism was running like a mill-race. His *Voltaire* was published in 1872, and all the books in which his opposition to Christianity finds its most vehement expression belong to the same decade. Now that period, or, let us say, the third quarter of the nineteenth century, has been spoken of as "perhaps the most critical in a religious point of view in the whole history of civilized man."¹ "At the close of the sixties," says Canon Scott Holland, "it seemed to us at Oxford almost incredible that a young don of any

¹ *The Position and Prospects of Theology*. Professor W. P. Paterson's inaugural lecture at Edinburgh University, p. 10.

intellectual reputation for modernity should be on the Christian side.”¹ Mr. R. H. Hutton wrote in the *Spectator*, in 1874, of what he called “The Approach of Dogmatic Atheism,”² while Dean Church, of all men the least likely to fall a victim to mental panic, declared from the pulpit of St. Mary’s, Oxford: “There are reasons for looking forward to the future with solemn awe. Signs are about us which mean something which we dare scarcely breathe. Anchors are lifting everywhere, and men are committing themselves to what they may meet with on the sea.”³ It was during this period that F. W. H. Myers surrendered the faith which had inspired his noble poem, *St. Paul*,⁴ and that John Richard Green gave up both his East End curacy and his early creed. “All the younger men of science,” Huxley told Kingsley, “whom I know intimately are *essentially* of my way of thinking. I know not a scoffer or an irreligious or an immoral man among them, but they all

¹ *Life and Letters of Mandell Creighton, D.D.*, vol. i, p. 75.

² Reprinted in *Contemporary Thoughts and Thinkers*, vol. i, p. 246.

³ From a sermon preached March 29, 1868: *Gifts of Civilization*, p. 118.

⁴ In the dedication to J. E. B. (Mrs. Josephine Butler) of the early editions the following words were added in Greek: “To whom I owe my own soul.” When I ventured once to ask Mr. Myers about this inscription he replied that he preferred to let it sleep.

regard orthodoxy as you do Brahmanism.”¹ In one single year—1874—Professor Tyndall delivered his famous Belfast address, the author of *Supernatural Religion* published his book, which at the time Morley thought had dealt a deathblow at the historical credibility of the Gospels, and Professor Clifford flung out his audacious forecast that in a very little time evidence “of the same kind and of the same cogency” as that which forbids us to assume the existence between the earth and Venus of a planet as large as either, would forbid our faith in a Divine Creator. “Never before, perhaps,” as Professor Paterson says, “was there the same danger of a wholesale apostasy of the men of mind and culture, not merely from Christianity, but from the religious view of the world.” Is it, then, to be wondered at that the writings of a young Oxford scholar,² dealing with subjects such as those that Morley had chosen should reveal the marks of the same perfervid zeal against Christianity as characterized so many of his intellectual contemporaries? What would surprise us is that books written under such conditions should embody their author’s final judgment on the deep matters with which they are concerned. Do they? I think not.

¹ *Life and Letters of T. H. Huxley*, vol. i, p. 320.

² Morley’s *Voltaire*, *Diderot*, *Rousseau*, and *Compromise* were all written before he was forty.

IV

The available facts, it must be admitted, are few and indecisive, but so far as they go they indicate a perceptible relenting on Morley's part. I do not mean, of course, that he has made, or is in the least degree likely to make, anything approaching a formal recantation. But there has been a change of temper; the old harshness is gone; the whole attitude is more generous and worthy. Morley once told an interviewer that the two men to whom he owed most were John Stuart Mill and Gladstone, and it is probably to the influence of the latter that we may trace in no small degree the gradual softening of Morley's tone. No man surely could know Gladstone as Morley knew him without learning a new respect for the faith which fashioned and inspired his whole life.

Various stories have appeared from time to time in the newspapers about Morley joining in the family worship of Christian homes in which he was being entertained as a guest—with the Aberdeens in Dublin, with his former constituents in Newcastle.¹ For the truth of some of these I can vouch on pretty high authority, and their significance for our present purpose lies in this: that when his

¹ See, for example, an article by the late Rev. Dr. Berry in *The Young Man*, January, 1895.

book on *Compromise* was written (1877) this was just the kind of insincere conformity on the part of an unbeliever that he sternly refused to sanction. For men, he said, who deliberately reject the entire Christian system to join in religious worship, whether in the home or the church, lest their refusal should cause discomfort to others, is to make a mock “both of their own reason and their own probity, merely to please persons whose delusions they pity and despise from the bottom of their hearts.”¹ Then has Morley put away his pity and his scorn? And are the “delusions” to him delusions no longer? We may draw our own conclusions.

Yet, after all, it may be said, this is but the tittle-tattle of the Press; what Morley has written he has written, and by it, until it be withdrawn, he stands to be judged. This is so; but, as I pointed out some years ago,² Morley’s later writings themselves bear witness to a more chastened mood. The evidence, I repeat, is but scanty—in Morley’s case, of late years, the politician has levied a heavy toll on the man of letters—but it is sufficient for our purpose. Who, for example, can pass from the early studies in Voltaire and the rest to the later works on Cromwell and Gladstone without

¹ P. 171.

² In *A Young Man’s Bookshelf*, p. 266.

noting the altered tone of which I have spoken ? It is not simply that things are said in the earlier books which find no echo in the later ; the climate has changed. If, however, specific quotation be desired I may point to two articles contributed to the *Nineteenth Century* in 1888 and 1892.¹ In the former of these, entitled, “ A Few Words on French Models,” there occurs the following : “ In essays like mine ” (those, that is, dealing with the literary precursors of the French Revolution), Morley writes, “ it may well have been that the better side of the thinkers concerned was sometimes unduly dwelt upon and their worst side unduly left in the background. It may well have been that an impression of personal adhesion was conveyed which only very partially existed, or even where it did not exist at all. . . . There may have been a too eager tone. . . . There were some needlessly aggressive passages and some sallies which ought to have been avoided because they gave pain to good people. There was, perhaps, too much of the particular excitement of the time.” The second article is entitled, “ A New Calendar of Great Men,” and is based on a volume edited by Mr. Frederic Harrison containing brief biographies of all the worthies in the Positivist Calendar of Auguste Comte. Morley has naturally

¹ Now reprinted, the former in *Studies in Literature*, the other in the fourth volume of *Miscellanies*.

something to say concerning the general scheme of the Calendar. Why, he asks, are these taken and those left? Why, in particular, are John Calvin and John Wesley omitted? "The evangelical movement, in which Wesley is the greatest name, unquestionably effected a great moral revolution in England. . . . Both the onslaught upon the slave trade, and the other remarkable philanthropic efforts towards the last quarter of the last century, arose in, and owed their importance to, the great evangelical movement of which this Calendar fatally omits to take any account." And so, too, in regard to Calvin. To omit him from the forces of Western evolution "is to read history with one eye shut." Hobbes and Cromwell are included; but Hobbes and Cromwell, giants as they were in their several ways, "compared with Calvin, not in capacity of intellect, but in power of giving a formal shape to a world, were hardly more than names writ in water." Calvinism it was, Morley agrees with Mark Pattison, that in the sixteenth century saved Europe.¹ The article closes with a reference to Thomas à Kempis and a definition of holiness. "Is not the sphere of these famous

¹ In the lecture on Machiavelli referred to on page 212 Morley declares that Calvin presents "a union of fervid religious instinct and profound political genius almost unexampled in European history" (p. 47).

meditations the spiritual rather than the moral life, and their aim the attainment of holiness rather than mere moral excellence ? . . . By holiness do we not mean something different from virtue ? It is not the same as duty ; still less is it the same as religious belief. It is a name for an inner grace of nature, an instinct of the soul, by which, though knowing of earthly appetites and worldly passions, the spirit, purifying itself of these, and independent of reason, argument, and the struggles of the will, dwells in living, patient, and confident communion with the seen and the unseen Good.” Then, when many of his readers must surely have wished that he would go on, the writer suddenly breaks off, saying that he is being drawn into matters too high for him, and the essay somewhat abruptly closes. Whether this is exactly the “ language of Canaan ” I will not undertake to say ; quite certainly it is not that of the uncircumcised Philistine, eager to give our carcasses to the fowls of the air and the wild beasts of the earth.

Into the far-reaching questions which the study of the life and work of a man like Lord Morley raises for the Christian mind, I cannot now enter ; but I will venture as I close to add of him what John Wesley wrote in his *Journal*, after reading the *Meditations* of Marcus Aurelius : “ I make no doubt

but this is one of those 'many' who 'shall come from the east and the west and sit down with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob,' while 'the children of the kingdom,' nominal Christians, are 'shut out.'''¹

¹ *Journal*, October 11, 1745.

IX

THREE LETTERS TO A YOUNG MAN
ABOUT BOOKS

IX

THREE LETTERS TO A YOUNG MAN ABOUT BOOKS

1. THE MINISTRY OF BOOKS

I REMEMBER sitting one day with a number of friends at the table of a kindly host. The talk turned to books. "Oh," said our host, with a gesture of impatience, "I have quit reading." He was a professional man in early middle life, alert, intelligent, prosperous, knowing well how to take occasion by the hand, but—he had "quit reading." It was a sorrowful confession to make, and I did not pursue the matter further. When I hear a man talk in that way I am too aghast for argument ; like the Queen of Sheba when she had seen all the wisdom of Solomon and the house that he had built, there is no more spirit in me. He had taken his course and was satisfied, but though I said nothing I inwardly thanked God that I was not as he, and I rejoiced to know that all his wealth multiplied a hundredfold could not buy from me my love of books.

I do not want to exaggerate. Let it be granted at once that a man may possess a strong and trained intelligence and yet owe very little to books. Let it be granted, too, that to be rather than to know is the chief end of man, and that the greatest thing in the world is not knowledge but character. “She is an excellent creature,” Lord Beaconsfield used to say of his wife, “but she never can remember which came first, the Greeks or the Romans.” And if we had to make our choice I hope we should all elect to be “excellent creatures” rather than concern ourselves about the Greeks and the Romans. Literature alone, as I once heard Lord Morley say, will not by any means “arrest and dissolve all the travelling acids of the human system.” Literature alone will not make a good man; the world has seen too many learned scoundrels to be in any doubt on that matter. But the right books rightly used help us to be, as well as to know; they awaken within us, as Lord Morley put it, the diviner mind; they rouse us to a consciousness of what is best in others and ourselves; and of all God’s gifts to man there are few that are more to be desired than an eager thirst to know the best that has been thought and said in the world. No man, Thackeray thought, could sit down in the British Museum without a heart full of grateful reverence. “I own,” he writes, “to have said my grace at the

table and to have thanked Heaven for this my English birthright, freely to partake of the bountiful books and speak the truth I found there.” “My power to read,” Gladstone wrote in his eighty-eighth year, when, after his long day, the night was fast closing in, “my power to read for a considerable number of hours daily, thank God, continues. This is a great mercy.” “To fall in love with a great author and to remain in love with him,” says another famous bookman—Sir W. Robertson Nicoll—“is one of life’s chief blessings.” Let me set down very simply and very briefly some of the ways in which books prove themselves the ministers of God to us for good.

1. They are our great teachers. There is a pretty story somewhere—in one of Robert Louis Stevenson’s books, I think—of an elderly French Abbé, who was found wandering alone in some out-of-the-way corner of the world. When surprise was expressed at his being so far away from home the Abbé explained that some time before he had had a dream : he was in heaven, and was being questioned about the fair world he had left ; to his shame he had little to tell—he had seen, he knew, so little. When he awoke he vowed that he would see, he would get to know ; and hence his distant travels. Now for most of us travel, at least on the great scale, is still a costly and im-

possible luxury. But books—all the great books, all the books that really matter—can be ours for a few pence or a few shillings, and with them in our hands the world lies before us. Besides, the traveller who is not also a reader misses nine-tenths of what he goes to see. His journeys—to use Huxley's famous illustration—are like a walk through a gallery filled with wonderful works of art, most of which have their faces turned towards the wall. Books will teach him what are the best worth turning round. Take, for example, Macaulay's Essays. As Lord Morley says, they are as good as a library ; “ They make an incomparable manual and vade-mecum for a busy, uneducated man who has curiosity and enlightenment enough to wish to know a little about the great lives and great thoughts, the shining words and many-coloured complexities of action, that have marked the journey of man through the ages.” And if any one pleads that he is too busy to concern himself with the past, that he finds enough and more than enough in the activities of the present, the answer is, of course, that without a knowledge of the past, without reading, no man can understand the present or wisely take his part in it. Consider, for example, with what a quickened interest a man would turn from reading a book like Morley's *Life of Gladstone* or Winston Churchill's *Life of his father*

to the political problems of the hour. Or, if ecclesiastical affairs be his chief concern, with how much surer tread would he find his way through the tangle of current controversies if first he had made himself at home in the story of John Henry Newman and the Oxford Movement. Or, to take but one more example, is it not as certain as anything human can be that the Republics of South America, including among them Mexico, must soon enter as they have never done before into the reckoning of the peoples both of Europe and North America ? During a recent month the number of immigrants landed at Buenos Ayres exceeded those landed at New York, and it is not improbable that before long the Argentine Republic may be the most numerous among all the peoples that speak a tongue of Latin origin, as the United States is already the most numerous of all that speak a Teutonic one. But how much does the average Englishman know about South America ? Let him read Lord Bryce's recent book on the subject, and his eyes will be opened to the magnitude of the problems which the awakening of this vast, neglected continent is thrusting upon us.

2. But books are more than instructors. They do us a real if not an exalted service in furnishing us with facts ; they are not to be despised even when they stoop to arm us for the ordeal of an

examination room. But this is perhaps their least honourable kind of service. Books are not merely honest hod-men dumping "useful information" at our door; they are kindly fairies opening with their magic wand secret chambers of delight. "Read," says Bacon, in his deep, wise way, "not to contradict, and confute, nor to believe and take for granted, nor to find talk and discourse, but to weigh and consider"; and to this every true bookman will assent. But may we not also read simply to enjoy? I do not want to be taught, or lectured, or "improved" every time I open a book; I want sometimes to laugh, to dream, to forget, to walk with my head in the clouds, happier that I feel no earth beneath my feet. There is a place among books for the humorist as well as the schoolmaster, for the laughing story-teller as well as the grave instructor, for rainbow dreams and fancies as well as solid fact and sober science. By all means let us read what will "do us good," only let us not forget that to make us happy *is* to do us good. And we are putting books to one of their best uses when round them, as Wordsworth says, "with tendrils strong as flesh and blood," we make "our pastime and our happiness" to grow.

3. And even in the preacher's stricter, narrower sense of the words, reading may "do us good."

I never weary of recalling and repeating a saying of John Newton's : " Two things," said he, " kept me out of hell : my early and lifelong love for Mary Catlett, and my early and lifelong love for good books." For multitudes their chief peril is the peril of the empty heart and their salvation lies in the creation of interests that are both pure and strong. *Whatsoever things*—for a young man there is no greater word in all the Bible than this—*whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honourable, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report, think on these things ;* fill up mind and heart and imagination with these things. This is the sovereign remedy for unclean thoughts. When evil throws some image of itself on the screen of the mind it is not enough merely to shut the eyes and turn away the head. We must throw some other image there more beautiful, more alluring ; and gradually the old will fade because the new is better, and so we shall overcome evil with good. Let a man learn to love good books, and he will find his love will lift him clean out of the reach of a hundred squalid temptations which every hour lie in wait for the man whose empty mind is an ever-open door through which the seven devils of uncleanness may enter and take possession of the life. Ply your books, ply

your books, and evil will knock in vain at the heart's door; passion's coarse appeal will fall unheeded and unheard.

4. I mention lastly a good book's "healing power." The phrase, of course, is Matthew Arnold's :

Time may restore us in his course
Goethe's sage mind and Byron's force,
But where will Europe's latter hour
Again find Wordsworth's healing power ?

Wordsworth himself was not a bookman. He possessed but few books, and his way of mishandling those he had was a sore trial to the book-loving soul of his friend Southey; but his own writings reveal in almost unequalled degree the peculiar quality described in Arnold's happy phrase. John Stuart Mill found in them, in a memorable crisis of his life, "a medicine" for his state of mind. "What Wordsworth does," as Lord Morley well says, "is to assuage, to reconcile, to fortify." And this is what books, the right books, rightly used, may do for us all. I say "the right books," for not all books will do this for us. There are books that are come to fling fire on the earth; they bring not peace but a sword; they are the children of revolt and the authors of it. And such books have their place and work in the world, but not of them do I speak just now. Gladstone named his library

at Hawarden “the temple of peace,” and that is what every man’s study, however humble, should be to him—not merely a workshop, but an oratory, from which, though he enter harassed, fretful, and depressed, he may pass out again quieted, soothed, and strengthened. “In all things,” said Thomas à Kempis, “have I sought rest, but nowhere have I found it save *in angello cum libello*”—in a nook with a book; for literature—it is no desecration of the great words to use them thus—literature is as a tree of life which yieldeth all manner of fruits, and whose leaves are for the healing of the nations.

2. ON CULTIVATING THE FRIENDSHIP OF BOOKS

I have said something in a previous letter of the blessedness of the book-lover. But what if a man have, as yet, but little interest in books? How can he become interested? What are the mystic passwords that will open for him the sealed doors? Well, let it be said at once, there are no passwords. To be interested in reading a man must read: there is the beginning and the end of the whole matter. At the same time, the friendship of books, like other friendships, may be cultivated. I propose therefore in this letter to make one or two simple suggestions born of experience for the strengthening of this happy bond.

1. "A man ought to read," says Dr. Johnson, "just as inclination leads him ; for what he reads as a task will do him little good." And for the general reader, as distinguished from the professional student, this is the golden rule : to read with interest as our ally. It is, of course, good that a man should, as early as possible, make the acquaintance of the great masterpieces of the world's literature, the books which, by the general suffrage of those best able to judge, have their place among the immortals. And yet I can think of no surer way to chill the enthusiasm of a young beginner than to set him to plough his way through some prescribed list of the "best hundred books." Let him begin where he can, and if he has sorrowfully to admit that some of the books which every educated man is supposed to know as yet make no appeal to him, let not that disturb him. There is, as Mr. Balfour says, "an enormous quantity of hollow devotion, of withered orthodoxy divorced from living faith, in the eternal chorus of praise which goes up from every literary altar to the memory of the immortal dead." Let us take no part in this soulless adoration ; above everything let us be sincere ; let us refuse to assume an interest which we do not feel. If, for example, we can delight in Tennyson, but find Spenser and Milton beyond us ; if we enjoy Robert Louis Stevenson's

essays more than Montaigne's ; if there is much profit for us in Mark Rutherford, but little in Marcus Aurelius ; if we kindle under Lord Morley, but slumber under Morley's master, Burke ; if we had rather spend one hour with R. W. Dale than two with Jeremy Taylor or Bishop Butler, let us not be ashamed to say so. The critic may tell me that modern literature, compared with the great works of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, is for the most part but as the small sticks and dust of the floor. Nevertheless, if these are task-work for me, while Tennyson and Stevenson and Rutherford and Morley and Dale are a continual refreshment and delight, then meanwhile, at any rate, these are the books for me. I repeat, we must begin where we can. The great thing is to get an appetite ; after that the question of fare will speedily settle itself. To a hungry man no good food comes amiss ; and, if we are hungry, since this appetite too grows by what it feeds on, we shall soon desire not only what is good, but what is best.

2. And now, having put in a plea for reading according to inclination, let me cross to the other side and urge the importance of method. Yet here too there must be liberty ; the method must be our own, of our own choosing, and adapted to our own necessities. What follows is only by way of

suggestion. If it has in it anything that is practicable, well and good ; if not, it may at least serve to point the way to something better.

(a) Matthew Arnold was in the habit of drawing up at the beginning of the year a list of the books he wished to read during the year. Two of these lists, reprinted in his *Notebooks*, lie before me as I write. They are somewhat formidable documents, containing books in five languages besides English. Ordinary readers, however, may console themselves with the reflection that Arnold always put upon his list many more than he expected to get through. "I am glad to find," he wrote to his sister on New Year's Day, 1882, "that in the past year I have at least accomplished more than usual in the way of reading the books which at the beginning of the year I had put down to be read. I always do this, and I do not expect to read all I put down ; but sometimes I fall much too short of what I purposed, and this year things have been a good deal better." The value of such a method is obvious : it helps to give balance and proportion to our reading ; it delivers us from the tyranny of chance desires. And though, like Arnold, we purpose more than we achieve, still the purpose is not vain.

Who aimeth at the sky
Shoots higher much than he who means a tree.

(b) Another method is to select some particular author and make him our most intimate companion, say, for a whole winter. If, for example, we were to choose Edmund Burke or Tennyson, in each case it would be well to begin with a good biography, or at least biographical sketch. In the case of Tennyson, we should turn naturally to the *Life* by his son; in the case of Burke our best introduction would be Lord Morley's little volume in the "English Men of Letters" series. Then from these we should pass to the detailed and probably chronological study of our author's own works. Here, again, the advantages of such a method are obvious. It enables us to trace the development—and it may be also the decline—of a great author's mind; it gives us, as perhaps nothing else could, a true measure of his greatness; and it secures to him on his side the opportunity for his powers to make their full and legitimate impression on our minds.

(c) Yet another method is to select, instead of an author, a particular subject or period, and make all our reading centre upon that. Suppose, for example, we take the story of that world-shaking hour,

When France in wrath her giant limbs upreared,
And with that oath, which smote air, earth and sea,
Stamped her strong foot, and said she would be free,

Lord Morley will show us how Voltaire, Rousseau, Diderot, and others laid the train for the mighty upheaval. Carlyle's pages of flame will light up the stage on which the many-coloured drama played itself out ; and in Edmund Burke, Coleridge, and Wordsworth, Byron and Shelley, we may see with what strange and manifold power the new leaven wrought in English literature. Or, if some longer period be desired, we may choose, say, the eighteenth century. This was the century which witnessed not only the French Revolution, but the birth of the United States, the rise of Prussia, and the beginnings in India, Canada, and Australia of the British Empire. It is the century of Samuel Johnson and John Wesley, of William Cowper and Robert Burns, of Edward Gibbon and David Hume, of John Howard and Robert Raikes. It is a century of famous statesmen—Walpole, Chatham, Burke, Fox, and Pitt—and of not less famous books—*Robinson Crusoe* and *The Vicar of Wakefield*, Gray's *Elegy* and the *Lyrical Ballads*, Butler's *Analogy* and Adam Smith's *Wealth of Nations*. To the eighteenth century in England belong our first novels, our first newspapers, our first essays, our first Sunday-schools, and our first Methodists. What a ceaseless panorama of delight to the mind that has trained itself to see and understand ! What an education to wander up and down in the

century, exploring its highways and its byways, reading its famous books, making the acquaintance of its famous men, until we begin to feel at home in it and able to find our way about it for ourselves ! Or, to take but one more example, suppose our choice be the great writers of America. The little volume bearing that title in the Home University Library will serve as a convenient introduction. Then, as we are able, we may turn to individual authors, until, province by province, we have possessed the whole land from Woolman and Jonathan Edwards to Mark Twain and Bret Harte. The pensive Hawthorne, the exuberant Lowell, the serene Emerson, the gay "Autocrat," the gentle Whittier, all are there to greet us. We can be boys again with Fenimore Cooper and his red Indians ; Francis Parkman's fascinating histories will tell us the story of the long struggle between France and England for the mastery in North America ; Longfellow will make again his simple appeal, and, if it fail to move us at thirty as perhaps it did at fifteen, we shall still find it sweet and wholesome, and we shall thank God for this and for all His good gifts to us who speak the tongue that Shakespeare spake.

3. I have only space in this letter for one other word of counsel, and I take it from the *Letters* of Matthew Arnold. Writing to one of his sisters,

he says : “ If I were you, I should now take to some regular reading, if it were only an hour a day. It is the best thing in the world to have something of this sort as a point in the day, and far too few people know and use this secret. You would have your district still, and all your business as usual, but you would have this hour in your day in the midst of it all, and it would soon become of the greatest solace to you. Desultory reading is a mere anodyne ; regular reading, well chosen, is restoring and edifying.” Is an hour too much to expect ? Then let us say half an hour, and surely, as Lord Morley said in the address from which I quoted in my last letter, “ it requires no preter-human force of will in any young man or woman—unless household circumstances are more than usually vexatious and unfavourable—to get at least half an hour out of a solid busy day for good and disinterested reading. . . . Now, in half an hour I fancy you can read fifteen or twenty pages of Burke ; or you can read one of Wordsworth’s masterpieces—say the lines on Tintern ; or say, one-third—if a scholar, in the original, and if not, in a translation—of a book of the *Iliad* or the *Æneid*. I do not think that I am filling the half-hour too full. But try for yourselves what you can read in half an hour. Then multiply the half-hour by 365, and consider what treasures you

might have laid by at the end of the year ; and what happiness, fortitude, and wisdom they would have given you during all the days of your life.”

A final suggestion, in some respects the most important of all, for the man who would cultivate the friendship of books, I hold over for my third letter.

3. ON HAVING BOOKS OF ONE'S OWN

Let me say at once—and in this matter I am not afraid nor ashamed to be dogmatic—no man is or ever will be a genuine book-lover who is not also, according to his ability, and sometimes even a little beyond it, a book-buyer. Mark Pattison used to say that no man who respected himself could have less than a thousand books, and very obligingly he went on to point out the space in which you can manage to stack a thousand octavo volumes. To many, of course, this will sound a madly impossible counsel of perfection. Nevertheless, the general law stands—every book-lover a book-buyer. I was once shown a note written to a young man by Dr. Alexander Whyte of Edinburgh. It ran something like this : “ Have you William Law’s *Serious Call* ? If not, then (as Coleridge used to say) sell your bed—only in this

case your bolster will do—and buy it ! ” There speaks your true bookman. But then Dr. Whyte is a Scot, and, however close-fisted in some matters the Scot may be—though, by the way, there are few subjects on which more nonsense has been talked than that—on books he spends freely. I know no city in the world to compare with Edinburgh for the character and number of its bookshops. I used to see more books in the homes of the working men there than I found among the prosperous bourgeois of Toronto. But the average Englishman, it must be confessed, is not a book-buying animal. He will spend without grudging on a good dinner, but he thinks a long time before he spends half as much on a good book—and then he doesn’t spend it ! If, as we often say, books are the food of the mind, then one can only wonder as he thinks of English towns with a population of 50,000 and more but without a single good bookshop in them, how multitudes of our fellow-countrymen manage to keep their souls alive. “ We call ourselves a rich nation,” says John Ruskin, “ and we are filthy and foolish enough to thumb each other’s books out of circulating libraries.”

“ But,” it may be urged, “ is not the public library with its well-thumbed volumes the best proof that after all we are a reading people ? We

do not now, it is true, buy our books from the shop-keeper, but we buy them as we buy our gas and water, from the municipality. And why not? Why not socialize our books, as for our greater good we have socialized so many things?" I am not concerned to argue the matter; certainly I am not going to rail against such eminently serviceable institutions as our public libraries; I can only repeat what, to a real book-lover, is as self-evident as one of Euclid's axioms, that though the books of another may be our servants, it is only our own books that will ever be our friends. Indeed, in this matter of books it is well to cleave to the counsel of Polonius: "Neither a borrower nor a lender be." For my own part, I am never thankful for the loan of a book. I agree with Ruskin, if it is worth reading it is worth buying; and, to be quite frank, and selfish as it may sound, though I delight in giving books, I am never eager to lend them. And there I touch on an ancient grievance of the bookman: why has the borrower of books no conscience? How comes it that a man, who, if he accept the loan of half a crown, will make haste to repay you by return of post, is yet conscious of no obligation in the matter of a borrowed book, which perhaps you would not have sold him for many half-crowns? What is this strange something about a book which trans-

forms honest, law-abiding citizens into thievish rogues ? I who speak, I too have suffered. Among my books there is a nearly complete set of the works of Dr. R. W. Dale, which I greatly prize. Several years ago a visitor in my library begged the loan of one of them. From that day to this I have seen neither it nor him. The book has long been out of print, and cannot now, I fear, be replaced. I agree with a writer in the *Spectator* : there should be a day of national humiliation on which all borrowed books should be returned. Meanwhile, we must protect ourselves as best we can. I know of one bookman who had printed on his book-plate a reference to Matthew xxv. 9 : *Go to them that sell and buy for yourselves*. It was a pretty broad hint, and yet, who knows ? perhaps not broad enough for those conscienceless marauders who borrow their neighbours' books and pay not again. In the interests of public morality and the comity of nations, the rule of Polonius should stand.

But this is a digression. I come back to my theme, and I say again that if all that we desire in books is acquaintances the public library may serve ; but if we would have lovers and friends we must have books of our own. Now, undoubtedly, this is a resolve which will involve us in many parleyings with Dame Prudence. She will tax us with extravagance every time we come out from a book-

shop with the tell-tale parcel under our arm. We may remind her that we have made an old suit last one more season for the sake of this very purchase, but—hard-featured vixen that she is—she refuses to be silenced. Then we must put a bold front upon it and tell her plainly that what she calls extravagance is not really extravagance at all, but a higher kind of economy. “Buy pudding”—so I have known a husband argue with himself and with his wife (and on my soul I like the argument exceeding well)—“buy pudding, and you eat it, and there’s an end on’t; buy clothes, and they wear out; but buy books, and ten years after they are still yours (unless, of course, they have been borrowed), and if they were good at the beginning are good still.” Perhaps the good Dame’s favourite device is to persuade us that at least we should buy no more books till we have read all those we have. It sounds so reasonable, but it is not to be listened to, no, not for an hour. Books have their times and seasons, and to get the best from them we must read them, not when Dame Prudence bids, but when their hour has come. This book on my shelf which is still unread, its time is not yet, but it is coming; when it has come we shall plight our troth either to other. Meanwhile, I buy another book.

I shall be told doubtless that all this may be well

enough for people with fat purses, or for those to whom books are the tools with which they earn their daily bread, but for all others, and especially for those with slender incomes, it is simply futility and wind. But is this really so? Instead of arguing the case in general terms, let me cite two instances to show whether it is want of means or want of will that leaves us without books of our own.

Many years ago a letter appeared in the *Spectator* which has since been reprinted in Ireland's *Book-Lover's Enchiridion*, and from which I take the following: "I am a very 'average' English-woman," said the writer, "and yet almost the keenest pleasure of my life has been to buy books. When I have made acquaintance with a noble, good, and beautiful book, I could not rest until it was mine—my very own. The years roll back as I write, and I see myself, five-and-twenty of them ago, young, and just married. We had very foolishly married without and against the consent of our parents, and they (God bless them!—they are here no more) thought, I fancy, to unmarry us, by a process of starvation. Many a time (my husband dining at an eating-house) did I eat only dry bread for dinner, all the while guarding and treasuring up—chiefly tied in a corner of my handkerchief for safety, fearing, if discovered, it

would go in beef and mutton—a sovereign given me by a cousin, and which I destined to the purchase of Boswell's *Life of Johnson*. I had to wait five months ere opportunity favoured me, but when at last I held the volumes in my eager hands, what were exile, and poverty, and vexation, in comparison? Every book on my shelves is dear to me, for every book means a sacrifice. But for what an end! . . . It is to me a small matter that I have mostly fed poorly and dressed plainly, since, by so doing, I have been enabled to gather under my roof the great and noble of the earth, who look down at me from my walls with the faces of friends. Had I (would to God I could have!) the boon of life once more I should, so far as the blessed acquisition of books goes, live it all over again."

For my second example I turn to Sir W. Robertson Nicoll's delightful little sketch of his father. Harry Nicoll was a minister of the Free Church of Scotland. All his long life was spent in a far-away corner of Aberdeenshire. His income at the best was never quite two hundred pounds, and often it was much nearer one hundred. He was married and had four children. And yet, as his son says, "If one had been asked any time during the last thirty years of my father's life, which ended in 1891, where the best library and the best bookman in Scotland were to be found, I think if he had

known the truth he would have referred the inquirer to my father's home"; for in that little Scottish manse were gathered some seventeen thousand volumes, all purchased with the savings from his narrow stipend!

"If you have two loaves of bread"—so runs a Chinese saying—"sell one and buy a lily." It is impossible to ignore the bread problem; it underlies all other problems; the loaf must come before the lily. Nevertheless, man cannot live by bread alone; he must "consider the lilies." Therefore, when we have made sure of our first loaf, let us gladly barter the second for lilies.



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